

“ENTREPRENEURS OF THE CHURCH WORLD”:
INVESTIGATING INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ENTERPRISE DISCOURSE
AND THE OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY OF CHURCH PLANTERS

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses enterprise discourse as a sociocultural umbrella that intersects with occupational practice and identity across sectors in the United States. Specifically, this project focuses on the ways in which enterprise influences contemporary religious workers – namely, evangelical Christian church planters – to more or less adopt the norms of entrepreneurship as they construct and enact occupational identities in their communities. Within this focus, this project responds to three problematics: first, overly static ways of knowing religion as an organizing force due to scholarship that too comfortably clings to the Protestant Ethic as a catch-all narrative; second, the limited scope with which scholars think of who an entrepreneur is, as well as what constitutes entrepreneurial forms of work; and third, the role of intersectionality and embodied social identities in struggles over normativity in religious work and entrepreneurship.

To explore these problematics, this dissertation adopts an organizational communication approach that understands occupational identities as discursive constructions. Guided by a commitment to social constructionism, this project is guided by three research questions: 1) How do church planters and texts about church planter identities explain and perform church planting as work? 2) How do church planters and texts about church planter identities employ religious and/or economic discourses to make claims about and construct a figurative practitioner? 3) How do assumptions about difference intersect with and participate in the occupational identity work of church

planters, and in the creation of texts about church planter identities? To answer these questions, I combine textual analysis with ethnographic methods, including participant observation, shadowing, and interviewing.

Analysis of the data results in several key findings. First, as an everyday job, church planting entails a complex mix of mundane and ministry tasks, including meeting work, prayer, and production work. Second, as church planters take on these tasks in an enterprise culture, they construct and enact competing entrepreneurial and religious occupational identity images that variously endorse and resist each other. I conclude the dissertation by theorizing the occupational ecosystem as a way of making sense of complex occupational identities like *church planter*, and present related practical implications for church plant practitioners.

*To Kaitlin,
my faithful companion on this journey –
my partner on every summit,
and my friend through every valley.
I love you.*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The discourse of enterprise has been said to be both widespread and profound in its influence on contemporary life in the United States (du Gay, 1996; du Gay & Salaman, 1992). It goes to work with us, comes home with us, prioritizes our relationships, and reshapes our bodies to be fit for our careers (Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). Indeed, enterprise discourse makes its mark upon numerous sociocultural spaces by variously but unwaveringly suffusing myriad social identity norms – including those attributed to race, gender, ethnicity, age, and, as this project suggests, religious work and beliefs – with the language of the market (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008). As a seemingly comprehensive system of knowledge that often takes effect through interactions organized by the work that we do, enterprise moves beyond implications of independent for-profit creativity to the sweeping application of market pressures and entrepreneurialism across countless spheres of human experience (du Gay & Salaman, 1992).

What is perhaps most striking about enterprise as an organizing discourse is its ability to wield and leverage a *moral* obligation to the logic of the market within the lives of society members, such that market-based rationalities rarely endure significant social resistance:

The power of enterprise conceptions appears to inhere in its continuing moral imperative. More than a conceptual heuristic that can illuminate particular phenomena in organizations, enterprise is upheld as virtuous, almost utopian, across all aspects of economic, political and social life (Fenwick, 2008, p. 327). Enterprise discourse, then, is not powerful only because it is seemingly universal in its sociocultural presence; it is powerful because its symbolic and material application is both simple and deemed to be inherently good, presenting the world with a moral benchmark by which life and work can be evaluated (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). And, in its virtuosity, enterprise discourse fades into a sort of vibrant obscurity, blending into the fabric of society such that it appears to be the tapestry of culture itself, and encouraging us to make our selves into enterprises through the symbolic and material alignment of all manner of human existence with the market (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). Moreover, as the language of the market becomes our primary vocabulary of moral and social judgment, the discursive project of enterprise can be thought of as *translation* – not so much the basic intersection of economic rationality with social identities, but rather the full transliteration of social activity, identity, and organizing into economic terms, such that those terms are bestowed with apparently unquestionable validity across the increasingly blurry line between work and life.

A primary cultural effect of the spread of enterprise as a socioeconomic ideology is the rise of the entrepreneur as an idealized practitioner archetype and hero of capitalistic enterprise (Gill, 2013). While enterprise operates like an ideological umbrella, shading and shaping the types, outcomes, and identities of labor that are

deemed to be valuable, entrepreneur/ship operates as an identity-focused discourse that legitimizes and sustains the enterprising umbrella (Gill, 2014). Indeed, under the umbrella of enterprise, all persons are beckoned to be “entrepreneurs of the self” with the promise of individual empowerment, self-discovery, cultural status, and opportunities for economic promotion at the expense of a collective conscience and sense of identity (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008; Gill, 2014; Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000; Inman, 2000). Thus, we might say that while enterprise is not necessarily an identity in and of itself, the *entrepreneur* is enacted by people under the influence of the ideology of free market capitalism at work and away from it; in this sense, we can think of the entrepreneur as the occupational manifestation of enterprise.

Notwithstanding theoretical linkages between enterprise discourse, entrepreneur/ship, and notions of economic *creation*, *moral* imperative, and social *judgment*, scholarly explications of the diverse intersections between enterprise discourse and “noncommercial” organizing, including contemporary Western religious work and occupations, seem to be in short supply. These intersections are made all the more intriguing by the idea that creation and judgment are discursive themes central to the practice of many organized religions, and American Christianity in particular. And yet there remains an apparent lack of interest here, perhaps due to the so-called “secular hegemony” of contemporary organization studies (Buzzanell & Harter, 2006). To some extent, organization scholars may be responsible for casting religious work and organizing discourses into roles of secondary importance; for example: “Economic discourses and everyday discursive interactions and material realities cannot be

disentangled from issues of race-ethnicity, gender, class, *and to lesser extents*, religion and sexuality” (Broadfoot, Carlone, Medved, Aakhus, Gabor, & Taylor, 2008, p. 155; emphasis added). The question is, then: Why are religious issues and identities (or issues of sexuality, or *any* issues to which are ascribed great importance by many people) seemingly often relegated to secondary positions in work and organization studies, especially if all identities are susceptible to the influence of enterprise? I find it unproductive (and perhaps unfair) to rehash the argument that organization scholars hesitate to theorize contemporary religious organizing and identities because religion is an uncomfortable subject (see Shenoy-Packer & Buzzanell, 2013; Tracey, 2012). Instead, I begin this exploration of communicative intersections between enterprise discourse, entrepreneur/ship, and contemporary religious work and occupations by stating that organization scholars have much to offer by (re)storying religion as a dynamic and meaningful human experience that, much like enterprise, is not just a form of organization, but is often enmeshed with other organizing discourses that frame identity narratives and social interaction at work (Koschmann, 2013).

However, due to shifting forms of religious participation and practice in the United States (Putnam & Campbell, 2010), as well as an increasing number of individuals who report no religious affiliation whatsoever (Chaves, 2011), we cannot assume that religion (or enterprise, for that matter) is either definitely present or definitely absent in stories about workers in contemporary organizations, *including* religious or faith-based organizations. By working from such assumptions, scholars are often left with no choice but to generate pale reconstructions of religious organizing,

built upon taken-for-granted images of religious work and identities that may not be as vibrant and interesting as the everyday experiences of individual (religious) workers. If, like enterprise, “religion is not ‘left at home’; it infuses working life”, then telling more compelling stories of religion, enterprise, and entrepreneur/ship means speaking to them in local contexts (Essers & Benschop, 2009, p. 404). Thus, I am interested here in surfacing and investigating the ways in which enterprise and religion more or less achieve translatability in the everyday expressions and experiences of work and identity by religious workers – namely, contemporary evangelical Christian church planters (a label I characterize later in this chapter), who, as this study finds, often consider themselves to be entrepreneurial workers as well. At stake is a greater understanding of the complexity of enterprise discourse, local experiences of (religious) work, and how contemporary religious occupational identities are contested and shaped in American communities, all of which are relevant and timely issues – particularly as emerging forms of American Christianity are enacted to varying degrees of power across an increasingly divisive political spectrum and within an increasingly enterprising culture (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). In the following pages, I discuss the overarching research problems that I address with this project. I also introduce the site and scope of my research and preview the forthcoming chapters of the project.

(Re)Thinking Contemporary Religion at/as Work

The first research problem that this project addresses is the limited scope with which organization scholars may view the people who do religious work as they negotiate their day-to-day jobs and accomplish occupational identities. The historical

relationship between economic and religious discourses (and perhaps especially between capitalism and Christianity) is rife with both affirmation and contradiction (Murtola, 2012); yet rather than push our thinking about both economic and religious discourses by investigating how these complexities play out in contemporary organizing, organization scholars are quick to fall back upon the Weberian Protestant ethic as a catch-all narrative for the experiences of religious individuals at work (Weber, 1930/2008). This project moves organizational theorizing beyond static conceptualizations of religious organizing by viewing religious work and identities as deeply meaningful and entwined with socioeconomic discourses, including enterprise and entrepreneur/ship, as they play out locally (Koschmann, 2013). Updating our understandings of religion at and as work is important because churches, as the most visible form of organized religion, remain significant social sites and workplaces that are shaped by the same cultural and economic pressures affecting American life and work in general (Chaves, 2011). Thus, changes in the ways Americans interact with organized religion also represent changes in American civic life, given that churches have traditionally been seen as catalysts for philanthropy, volunteering, and community association (Chaves, 2011). What this project attempts to uncover is the ways in which emerging American churches might also occur as distinct sites of enterprise and occupational entrepreneur/ship.

Consider, for example, the recent revelation that 47% of contemporary American Christians have reportedly engaged in “church shopping”, or searching for a new church by visiting multiple congregations – and that American congregational choice depends in large part on evaluations of potential for social investment (Putnam & Campbell, 2010).

This example suggests that the notion of church as mostly separate from the commercial world of work is no longer tenable. Instead, like other organizations, the church has been commercialized as a site for investment and an ideological sanctuary for enterprise. Indeed, we cannot go to church to escape the reach of the market; on the contrary, it appears that the church has become a place where the market might be even more fully embraced. Thus, for the everyday person who is attempting to make social, religious, and work choices, understanding how contemporary churches go about their work in more or less entrepreneurial ways may lead to more informed decisions regarding civic engagement. At stake, then, is the development of more dynamic views of contemporary religious organizing, as well as a greater understanding of what local expressions of religious work can teach us about the overall experience of living and doing work in an enterprise culture.

Thus, this project begins to tease out how religious work roles and identities are negotiated and take on meaning via interactions that occur in everyday religious work contexts, wherein enterprise and entrepreneur/ship discourses may be more or less influential (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). Specifically, this study investigates how enterprise discourse plays out – and, relatedly, how entrepreneur/ship discourse is mobilized and practiced – in contemporary and emerging forms of religious work and organizing. Perhaps organization scholars have yet to meaningfully consider intersections between religious and economic discourses at work due to our tendency to categorize religious work as “unique work” (Bickerton, Miner, Dowson, & Griffin, 2014, p. 370). Such a characterization separates religious work from other kinds of work,

and implies that we cannot know religious and non-religious work in the same ways; thus, it obscures how enterprise discourse may professionalize religious working identities through entrepreneurialism, and ultimately grants both enterprise and religious discourse an invisible and unquestionable place at work. Moreover, rather than contradicting the Weberian thesis, this project (re)opens conversations about religious work and organizing by acknowledging uncertainty and paradox in the everyday enactment of religion (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). Certainly, then, a primary goal of this project is that scholars would “see not tiny new things but old things with new eyes”, thereby avoiding “premature closure” in organizational analyses of issues of religion, enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, and work (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013, p. 254).

Ultimately, this dissertation attempts to contribute contextualized understandings of the complexity of religious work experiences, including how macro-social and economic discourses may be drawn upon as resources for narratively constructing and enacting an ideal (religious) working self (Wieland, 2010). Contextual knowledge of the work that people do is important if we are to better understand how enterprise organizes work and entrepreneurializes identities beyond traditional institutional boundaries. On the other hand, putting work into context also helps us speak to the incompleteness of enterprise, religion, and entrepreneur/ship, thereby potentially generating opportunities for people to resist or transform them in empowering or socially constructive ways (Fenwick, 2008). Furthermore, foregrounding stories of contemporary religious workers enables us to tell more compelling stories about work as a dynamic activity that is central to human experience. Importantly, religious occupations are not enacted in

isolation; instead, these occupational identities and stories about the people who do them matter for the public because they have emotional and material effect on the communities in which they occur. Thus, telling stories about contemporary occupations, religious or otherwise, can help people understand how workers and their organizations are engaging with society through notions of enterprise, instead of discourses of spirituality, morality, or social justice. The challenge, then, is to disrupt academic assumptions about religious identity *at work* by investigating how religion is variously and socially enacted *as work* alongside enterprise and entrepreneur/ship. To this end, this project analyzes the occupational identities constructed and enacted by “*church planters*”, or *individuals who start and grow autonomous local church organizations, often but not always with the help of a network or parent church body* (Johnson, 2010), particularly as they engage with other social discourses in their expressions of work – including entrepreneur/ship and notions of normativity and difference (McDonald, 2015).

Extending the (Religious) Entrepreneurial Self

Secondly, I address problematic limitations within contemporary thinking about who or what constitutes an entrepreneur, and how enterprise and entrepreneur/ship are more or less expressed and enacted in emerging work contexts (Gill, 2013). Despite continuing debates across fields of organizational scholarship regarding definitions of the entrepreneur and the work an entrepreneur does, there is general agreement among communication and discourse scholars that the language of enterprise acts upon working identities by encouraging entrepreneurial self-representations at work and at home

(Holmer Nadesan and Trethewey, 2000). The paradox of entrepreneurialism is its appearance as simultaneously indefinite in application and bounded by the economic rationality of self-commodification (Fenwick, 2001). Indeed, enterprise discourse calls upon individuals to entrepreneurialize their senses of self “in all spheres of life, subordinating their desires for development, meaning, fulfillment, relationships, *even spirituality* to their work activity and work capacity” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 127; emphasis added). In the context of this study, then, the question remains: How does the entrepreneurial commodification of the self play out in emerging work contexts that are explicitly religious? In other words, how do religious individuals interact with and make sense of entrepreneurialism and the influence of enterprise on the working self when religion *is* their work activity?

Answering these questions is an important task because, as Chaves (2011) points out, stable religious commitments no longer breed social, economic, or political views; instead, that flow has reversed, such that people actively change their religious identities and activities to match socioeconomic and political commitments. Thus, American Christianity, which is commonly perceived to be oriented around communities and associated with social justice issues, has begun to wrestle with its role in the outgrowth of economic and political rationalities. This struggle also means that the religious worker must wrestle with whether or not to become an economic actor who speaks in the language of the market; and, rather than preaching messages that are intended to benefit whole communities, the church is pressured to follow the market in privileging churchgoers who try to “fit” the message. Certainly, this shift benefits people who

already fit the message because they are deemed capable of being enterprising – a status typically reserved for wealthy, white, heterosexual men (see Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; Gill, 2014). On the other hand, the conflation of enterprise and religion also suggests that people who do not seem capable of being enterprising may be left to suffer without the social support and moral guidance that was once a common aim of the church. To highlight these effects, this study surfaces how economic identities and entrepreneurial ideals have begun to define religious practice and morals in church planter work (and vice versa), including the practical implications of this economic and cultural shift for church planters and how they engage with their local communities. Moreover, because entrepreneur/ship has become both a preferred class of worker (Gill, 2014) and a set of idealized cultural behaviors (Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000), examining entrepreneur/ship in church planting contributes greater insight not just into contemporary religion, but also into enterprise as an increasingly widespread ideology.

Problematically, a significant portion of scholarship that considers intersections between religion and enterprise rests too comfortably, as this project argues, on the Weberian assumption that religion and entrepreneur/ship form a seamlessly functional and profitable dyad. Indeed, if we accept the functionalist assumption that entrepreneurs are motivated by a set of distinct internal values, it becomes easier to characterize internally-held religious beliefs as impetuses for responsible entrepreneurial behavior (see Audretsch, Bonte, & Tamvada, 2013; Balog, Baker, & Walker, 2014; Dougherty, Neubert, Griebel, & Park, 2013; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Ferguson, Dougherty, & Neubert, 2014; Valliere, 2008; Zelekha, Avnimelech, & Sharabi, 2014). The problem

with this cause-effect line of reasoning is that it attempts to explain the experience of both religious work and entrepreneur/ship according to successful economic output; yet we could argue that religion, work, and enterprise can be experienced and understood in myriad ways, from struggling with contradictions between self-identity and external conditions, to crafting a story of the self in a search for personal and experiential coherence at work (Alvesson, 2010).

To help tease out and texturize the complex relationship between church planter work, occupational identity, and entrepreneurialism, this study views that relationship through the lens of the *glass slipper* metaphor, which suggests that we come to know an occupation according to the social identities associated with it (Ashcraft, 2013). Thus, this study provides an element missing from our taken-for-granted views of religious workers by considering how multiple forms of social knowledge affect their day-to-day work choices and the identities they come to normalize, including idealized notions of entrepreneur/ship (Gill, 2013). Specifically, to conceive of *church planter* as an occupational identity influenced by intersecting discourses of religion and enterprise suggests an evolving religious organizational experience (Ashcraft, 2005; 2006; 2007). However, rather than constructing a profile of church planting as a new form of organizational operation (Paas, 2012), I analyze the ways in which *church planter* is communicatively expressed and enacted as an occupational identity, imagined and constructed via macro-level organizing discourses, including entrepreneur/ship (see Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Ashcraft, 2007; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). The work of church planters presumably produces church plants,

but I follow from Ashcraft (2013) in arguing that understanding church plants as organizations effectively begins with an understanding of the discursive essence and social enactment of the occupational identity that organizes them.

Ultimately, this study attends to limitations in contemporary images of the entrepreneur by theorizing *church planter* as an emerging, dynamic, and more or less entrepreneurial form of occupational identity. Church planting – which may be conceptualized as entrepreneurial by framing it as the activity of a (religious) individual perceiving an opportunity within a given community and creating a (religious) organization to pursue it (Bygrave, 1997) – has become a highly valued work activity within American evangelical Christian circles. Indeed, contemporary evangelical Christianity has been characterized by the ability of evangelical churches to embrace and shift *with* changing cultural and economic landscapes rather than working to maintain static organizational identities despite such changes (Finke & Stark, 2003; 2005; Shibley, 1998). Thus, the shape and value of religious work appears to be changing once again, particularly as religious organizations search for new forms of sociocultural relevance in response to the slow but steady decline of American participation in traditional “mainline” denominational communities (Chaves, 2011). This dissertation promotes a more nuanced view of day-to-day religious work and occupational identities in order to make sense of the shifting landscape of religious organizing – and, by extension, forms of work and organizing that are not overtly religious but remain under the influence of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship discourse.

Religion, Entrepreneurship, and the Struggle Over Normativity

The third research problem addressed by this dissertation is the need for greater theoretical and practical knowledge about how religion and entrepreneur/ship struggle over, manifest, and normalize certain constellations of identity difference. Thus, I borrow from (though I do not necessarily fully adopt) McDonald's (2015) queer theory framework for understanding difference that "emphasizes normativity over categories of identity", which better facilitates knowledge of "the ways in which people experience privilege and disadvantage in relation to difference" (p. 322). Both religion and entrepreneur/ship suggest morally preferred occupational identities and work behaviors; for, example, *entrepreneur* is an occupational identity that has been shown to be normalized around discourse that promotes a white, middle-class, heteronormative male figure, *even if that discourse does not always speak directly to those "categories" of difference* (Bruni et al., 2004; Gill, 2014). Moreover, as these moralized identities coalesce around particular normative assumptions about preferred selves, certain workers who are capable of accessing these norms are privileged as legitimate, while others are disadvantaged and denied equal occupational status. This problem is also important to investigate because *church planter* and *entrepreneur* are not occupational identities that are enacted in isolation; therefore, the way that the people who claim these occupations materially manifest and embody the normative assumptions associated with them is likely to have a significant shaping effect on the communities in which these occupational identities occur.

For example, one way that this dissertation approaches this research problem is

by exploring how church planters navigate notions of femininity and masculinity as they construct occupational identities. On one hand, religious work may involve expressions of charity and relational care – a kind of work often thought of as feminine, and in religious culture, associated with “weak” figures, such as Mother Teresa (Ramvi & Davies, 2010; Walkowitz, 1990). On the other hand, in an effort to lend sociocultural meaning to their work – that is, to characterize their work as a “real job” – religious workers may attempt to masculinize their occupation by aligning it with popular images of the male-figured entrepreneur. The result is beyond mere gender categorizations of *church planter* as an occupation; instead, what emerges is a social construction contest over the normativity of the figurative ideal religious worker, wherein the people who do church planter work struggle over contradictions between their self-view and external identity influences (Alvesson, 2010; Ashcraft, 2013; McDonald, 2015). At stake here is a more meaningful understanding of how organizing discourses such as religion and enterprise do “body work” on religious workers such as church planters, shaping who the people who do this work come to identify as the normative embodiment of the ideal working self (Trethewey, 1999; Trethewey, Scott, & LeGreco, 2006). Thus, as this dissertation investigates how enterprise discourse organizes the expression of church planter identity narratives, it also generates insights about the kinds of bodies that are excluded from doing church planter work or engaging with the material presence of church plants.

Within this research problem is a consideration for the ways in which the discourses of enterprise and religion intermingle to construct preferred identity norms

that come to be materially represented (Jones & Murtola, 2012). If indeed the body has become a signpost for the effects of enterprise on work and identity (Eleff & Trethewey, 2006), then encountering and observing how individual bodies come to materially represent and express religious work can enhance our efforts to speak to enterprise and entrepreneur/ship (Ashcraft, 2005). This exploration is motivated by the dual understanding that communication simultaneously gives meaning to and constrains the way we make sense of the symbolic and the material at work (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). Indeed, focusing on the discursive constitution and expression of work does not deny the materiality of working bodies, but instead highlights the working body as a complex site of struggle that is often enacted through entrepreneurial communication and practice (Trethewey et al., 2006).

This research problematic recognizes that work performances and expressions of identity are limited by physical capacities, such that “all available options are not available to all people” – especially, perhaps, people whose work experiences are organized according to preferred identity claims (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 34). Indeed, religious work (and work in general) is experienced differently depending on the normative realities that can be accessed by certain religious workers (Ashcraft, 2006; McDonald, 2015; Trethewey et al., 2006). For example, *church planter* is a highly gendered occupational identity; Acts 29, the largest evangelical Christian church planting support network in the United States, promotes a book titled *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission* (Patrick, 2010), which defines biblical church planters as rugged, patriarchal men. Thus, as part of its normativity framework, this

dissertation analyzes how central gender alignment is to the expression and enactment of the work of church planters, regardless of whether they identify as female or male (McDonald, 2015). This problem is made all the more intriguing when we consider Chaves' (2011) insight that the number of female religious workers is increasing, but they are still more likely to be assistants than head clergy or lead pastors in evangelical churches. Ultimately, uncovering issues of normativity in church planting is important for generating meaningful insights about the experience of contemporary religious work, particularly so if religious workers are increasingly seen as economic figures; perhaps more importantly, these questions are significant for seeking practical answers regarding how society may be deciding who gets to define morality and, more specifically, who gets to do "moral" forms of work. (see Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008; Bruni et al., 2004; Fenwick, 2001; Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000; Mulholland, 1996; Reed, 1996).

Finally, this project is important because of its potential for contributing useful knowledge across social, organizational, and academic boundaries. First and foremost, this study contributes a new vantage point from which organization scholars and practitioners may better view and understand (religious) organizations as complex, dynamic, and situated sites of work and identity. Contemporary religious organizing – and Christian organizing in particular – is shifting via the emergence of localized organizational forms such as church plants in regions of the world where, at one time or another, larger religious institutions represented a taken-for-granted element of sociocultural life. For instance, though spiritual beliefs and religious rituals remain

relatively common in the United States, fewer Americans than ever before are attending traditional institutional churches (Chaves, 2011). Simultaneously, more Americans than ever before are placing social premiums on entrepreneur/ship, casting the entrepreneur as a working identity with high social and organizational value as well as positive moral character (see Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Gill, 2013; Roper & Cheney, 2005). While some exploration of intersections between these cultural trends is occurring in the sociological study of the “religious economy” (see McKinnon, 2011; Montgomery, 1996; Pfaff & Corcoran, 2012; Wollschleger & Porter, 2011; Woodberry, 2005), this project is interested in invigorating these interdisciplinary conversations by investigating local expressions and performances of religious work as they emerge concomitantly with enterprise culture and the organizations religious work may create. Thus, while I hope to speak to scholars of organizations and organizing more broadly, I also intentionally take up a discursive approach to explore these research problems from within my central field of organizational communication – an interdisciplinary field that has played a key role in developing a social constructionist framework for the complex relationship between discourse, culture, identity, and organizing (Allen, 2005; Ashcraft et al., 2009; Carlone & Taylor, 1998; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Wieland, 2010).

Chapter Overview

I provide a brief overview of the remaining chapters in this dissertation. Chapter Two provides a context for the considerations of this introductory chapter by more deeply reviewing arguments present in the extant literature. First, my review highlights enterprise discourse as a cultural umbrella that pervades contemporary notions of life

and work, and I consider in more detail how a neoliberal worldview undergirds and mobilizes enterprise discourse through casting entrepreneur/ship as an occupational ideal. Next, I review how religious work has been theorized, with an eye toward the ways in which enterprise and capitalism have historically intersected with religious organizing in the United States, including the complicated role that religion plays as a feature of contemporary moral and economic life. Then, I highlight notions of identity in organization studies as a research framework, and consider how the narrative construction of identity norms at work contributes to and problematizes this study. Finally, as the central goal of this project is to extend the ways in which organization scholars theorize how people explain and perform (religious) work identities vis-à-vis interactions that are more or less influenced by enterprise as an organizing discourse, I conclude the literature review by posing the following research questions: First, how do church planters and texts about church planter identities explain and perform church planting as everyday work? Second, how do church planters and texts about church planter identities employ religious and/or economic discourses to make claims about and construct a figurative practitioner? And third, how do assumptions about difference intersect with and participate in the occupational identity work of church planters, and in the creation of texts about church planter identities?

Chapter Three unpacks my metatheoretical commitments, describes the ethnographic research design those commitments supported, and details the data analysis procedures I followed. First, I approach this study from an intersubjectivist paradigmatic position (Cunliffe, 2011). Briefly, intersubjectivism acknowledges that all knowing is

partial and perspectival, and that the world is generated through relational human interaction in situated moments. Accordingly, to investigate enterprise discourse as a cultural umbrella that variously and actively intersects with assumptions about normativity to influence entrepreneur/ship, religion, and their associated occupational identities, I conducted ethnographically inspired research with evangelical Christian church planters located across the United States. These sites were made available to me because I developed a friendship with a local church planter in Bryan, Texas, who agreed to act as a study participant and informant capable of providing me with access to his personal network. Specifically, to collect data for this project, I (a) observed and interviewed church planters about their work; (b) shadowed church planters in their day-to-day work activities; and (c) analyzed macro-level textual resources about church planter work and identities, including church plant websites and theological books written by church planters.

In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I present the themes that emerged from my ethnographic data collection and subsequent iterative analysis process (Tracy, 2013). Chapter Four addresses Research Question One by describing the ways in which evangelical church planters talk about and perform their work on a daily basis, with an eye toward the more or less prominent emergence of entrepreneur/ship in their work processes. Chapter Five begins to respond to Research Questions Two and Three by analyzing and interrogating the ways in which church planter discourse constructs a figurative *religious* practitioner, including the identity norms associated with this figure. Then, Chapter Six acts as a “Part II” for Chapter Five, turning the analysis toward

church planter constructions and normalizations of a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner, an occupational ideal who simultaneously endorses and challenges the religious figure that emerges in the preceding chapter. Chapters Five and Six work together to address how church planters navigate an occupational position that seems to emerge between two conflicting visions for who the ideal contemporary church planter *should be* at work, at church, and at home. Overall, my three analysis chapters also align to respond together to the twin questions asked by the glass slipper metaphor to help uncover and investigate occupational identities. In this, as Chapter Four answers Research Question One, it also answers *what is church planter as a line of work*; subsequently, as they respond to Research Questions Two and Three, Chapters Five and Six also help us ask and answer, *who does church planter as a line of work* (Ashcraft, 2013).

In the seventh and concluding chapter of this dissertation, I consider the theoretical and practical contributions this project makes to the study of enterprise, religion, work, and entrepreneur/ship. To this end, Chapter Seven summarizes my findings and puts my analysis into a conversation centered on the broader implications of the project. Herein, this dissertation provides a missing piece in the burgeoning conversation surrounding enterprise discourse and entrepreneur/ship by considering how enterprise affects work, occupational identity, and normativity in local religious contexts that may not typically be thought of as entrepreneurial. I suggest that this approach is one of the keys to better understanding how enterprise organizes myriad cultural contexts, and vice versa, through the occupational manifestation of the idealized

entrepreneur. Practically, this project may help church planters, pastors, ministers, and other church leaders to reflexively understand and evaluate how discourses of entrepreneur/ship are shaping the culture and identity of contemporary religious organizing, faith practices, and the communities in which these individuals live and work. Moreover, this project may help citizens make more informed choices about work and religious participation by increasing our knowledge of shifts in civic organizing, sociocultural relationships, and the expectations that surround contemporary forms of work. With these outcomes in mind, it is my ultimate hope that this project usefully serves both the academy and religious organizations – both of which I am a part, and both of which have played essential roles in shaping my identity as a person and a scholar.

CHAPTER II

UNDERNEATH THE UMBRELLA OF ENTERPRISE: WORK, IDENTITY, AND RELIGION

This study is principally an investigation into enterprise discourse as a cultural umbrella, underneath which enterprise is culturally manifested, mobilized, and practiced as an occupation via entrepreneur/ship. Moreover, I suggest that knowing the extent of the sociocultural effects of enterprise means knowing how entrepreneur/ship intersects with and is locally manifested alongside other occupational identities, including those that we might not think of as entrepreneurial, such as *church planter*. Accordingly, I position this literature review as a communicative exploration of enterprise and religion, as well as their intersections with cultural notions of work and identity (see Carlone & Taylor, 1998). As I will argue in this chapter, an interpretive investigation of enterprise discourse as it plays out in local religious working contexts will contribute a deeper understanding of contemporary work identities, push our thinking on the practical effects of entrepreneur/ship in diverse contexts, and help scholars to better theorize the dynamic complexities of emergent forms of religious organizing.

I assume a communicative approach to understanding the socially constructive role of discourses, including enterprise and religion. In this, I follow from Phillips and Hardy's (2002) assertion that social reality is dependent on the (re)production of discourses, such that "without understanding discourse we cannot understand our reality,

our experiences or ourselves” (p. 2). Here, I adopt the term *discourse* to refer to enduring systems of thought and meaning that emerge and are (re)produced through situated interaction in local contexts (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), and which I unpack further later in this chapter. More specifically, this study proceeds from the argument that enterprise discourse has become a sort of sociocultural umbrella, underneath which individuals communicate, work, assemble identities, and construct realities through interaction that is always/already shaded by enterprise (Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). To support this argument, this literature review and the study itself proceed as an interrogative exploration of organizing discourses that intersect through communication to influence the world in the shade of enterprise (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004).

Accordingly, this study joins other organizational communication scholars who proceed upon the claim that communication both expresses and creates social realities (Ashcraft et al., 2009). I follow from Ashcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren (2009) in defining *communication* as an “ongoing, situated, and embodied process whereby human and non-human agencies interpenetrate ideation and materiality toward meanings that are tangible and axial to organizational existence and organizing phenomena” (p. 34). This means that people make sense of the material and symbolic elements of work and organizing through communication that is both shaped by people and influenced by discourses. In this sense, I share common ground with communication scholars who call for a focus on the symbolic and material effects of discourse as they shape our bodies and notions of day-to-day work (Ashcraft et al., 2009). Thus, while constructing this

review to support my efforts to speak to enterprise discourse, entrepreneur/ship, and religious organizing, I also consider the role of materiality and embodiment at work, and include scholarly voices that have done so to date (Ashcraft, 2013).

This project can be seen as a response to Fenwick's (2008) suggestion that expanding our understanding of enterprise requires culturally sensitive approaches that contextualize the effects of enterprise discourse. Specifically, Fenwick (2008) calls upon scholars to investigate the identities of actors in contexts where enterprise is a dominant mode of thought, especially as these persons engage in everyday discursive practices. In other words, there is a need for research that traces how people variously take up, resist, and reinvent systems of thought – including enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, and religion – in “unpredictable patterns” that become visible in their day-to-day lives and interactions (Fenwick, 2008). Accordingly, what I seek to investigate are the shifting and complex ways in which enterprise and religious discourses intersect in the everyday expression and more or less entrepreneurial achievement of religious work by religious workers. Through an ethnographic study of church planters, or *individuals who start and grow autonomous local church organizations, often but not always with the help of a network or parent religious body* (Johnson, 2010), I endeavor to capture specific “moments of enterprise” and their more or less recognizable and meaningful effects on the cultural production of *church planter* as an occupational identity and line of work (Fenwick, 2008, p. 331).

To set the stage for these moments, however, I begin with a deeper consideration of enterprise discourse as an overarching communicative and sociocultural framework.

Secondly, I highlight intersections between religion, enterprise, and entrepreneur/ship along the shifting landscape of contemporary religious work and organizing. And finally, I review notions of identity as they are communicatively constructed in relation to organizations, occupations, and normativity (McDonald, 2015), with an eye toward how church planters navigate gendered selves at work. Ultimately, this literature review attempts to broaden my argument that discovering a more dynamic view of enterprise discourse and religious organizing begins with achieving more local understandings of the experiences of people who do certain lines of work, including religious forms of work like church planting.

Enterprise and Culture: (Re)Organizing Work as Identity

As a discourse with symbolic and material effect, enterprise has revisioned and remodeled contemporary Western life and organizing (du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008). The slippery nature of enterprise discourse results in its seamless accommodation with other social systems of meaning, such that enterprise appears to be an idea through which all identities and meanings naturally filter and emerge (Fenwick, 2008). What sets enterprise discourse apart from other macrosocial discourses is its power of symbolic *and* material accumulation; indeed, enterprise plays out practically as the widespread legitimization of market pressures through its repeated expression as both the subject and object of social interaction. Thus, the language of enterprise becomes our primary vocabulary, not only for economic valuation, but also for social and moral judgment (da Costa & Saraiva, 2012; du Gay & Salaman, 1992). Moreover, in an American culture where moral commitments have begun to flow out of

social and political views, enterprise capitalizes on this reversal by encouraging moral discourses, including religion, to speak for the market by taking on economic and entrepreneurial patterns. In this sense, taking on the subject of enterprise as a discourse reveals that it is continuously enacted in relationship with other discourses in our everyday communication (Fenwick, 2008).

The discursive effects of enterprise. In using the term *enterprise discourse*, I am specifically drawing upon the work of du Gay and Salaman (1992), who argue that enterprise can be thought of as a pervasive system of thought that is (re)produced as “enterprising qualities” – including self-reliance, personal responsibility, boldness, and risk-taking – are promoted as virtuous through interaction guided by these themes. For du Gay and Salaman (1992), contexts in which enterprising themes are culturally prevalent can be thought of as *enterprise cultures*, wherein enterprise becomes a normative mode of thought and communication across social and economic spheres, and the crucial relationship between work and non-work identities is blurred (du Gay, 1996; du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). It is from this perspective that I investigate how enterprise and religion intersect to influence the discursive expression and social enactment of contemporary religious work, such as church planting (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008).

Importantly, enterprise is not monolithic in its discursive expression, but is instead a complex and contradictory system of socioeconomic meaning that is entwined with and enacted through the taking up of other discourses, including commodification and entrepreneur/ship (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008; Gill, 2013). Secondly, though its

ubiquity objectifies its socioeconomic presence, enterprise discourse cannot be separated from the discursive and material contexts through which it emerges (McCabe, 2009). In other words, *speaking to enterprise discourse in new and interesting ways requires engaging with enterprise as it emerges locally in multiple contexts*. This perspective, coupled with the more dynamic view that religion is an expressive and situated aspect of identity rather than a singular, monolithic social institution (Chaves, 2011; Koschmann, 2013) allows us to meaningfully investigate how enterprise and religion intersect in the lives of diverse individuals who work in an enterprise culture.

In *Consumption and Identity at Work*, du Gay (1996) describes enterprise as an organizational discourse built upon notions of excellence that fit hand-in-hand with contemporary neoliberal political rationalities. Excellence serves enterprise discourse by patterning individual meanings and identities with the goals and objectives of work and organizations (du Gay, 1996). In other words, enterprise positions excellence as a standard mode of identity expression at work that seemingly enables the self-actualizing capacities of the worker through alignment with organizational norms. The message is that excellence requires self-actualization, and self-actualization requires personal alignment with organizational goals and objectives (du Gay, 1996). Moreover, enterprise casts personal circumstance as irrelevant to the achievement of excellence; indeed, a central claim of enterprise discourse is that all people have an equal opportunity to fully realize and profit from their own human capital (Fenwick, 2002). Thus, in an enterprise culture, failure to achieve self-actualization at work – that is, failure to be excellent – is the sole responsibility of each individual. By reaching across the divide between

individual and organization, enterprise (re)organizes both the personal experience and organizing achievement of work, and encourages people to filter the rest of their lives through the lens of work (Doolin, 2002). Given the colloquial notion that self-fulfillment is also a feature of pursuing religious beliefs, considering how enterprise and excellence play out in the daily working lives of people who do religious work contributes unique insight into how these discourses shape identities within and between myriad spheres of life.

According to du Gay and Salaman (1992), enterprise discourse emerges not only in speech and writing, but also as a dimension of material work practices. Thus, enterprise discourse claims as its subjects not just our vocabularies and talk, but also our physical bodies, the physical manifestations of our work, and the physical places in which we organize (Leclerq-Vandelannoitte, 2011; Trethewey et al., 2006). Here, *place* refers to material spaces, such as local offices as well as cities or regions, infused with people, symbols, and meaning that become central to how we make sense of work and images of work (Elsbach, 2003; Larson & Pearson, 2012). Via enterprise, entrepreneur/ship also materializes in our working bodies through discursive associations we construct to identify with our work *and* to describe different places in which our work is done, including work sites, cities, regions, and nations (Gill & Larson, 2014). Thus, knowing how enterprise and religion intersect at work can be partially achieved by observing how religious workers describe, construct, and navigate their physical work contexts in more or less entrepreneurial ways. In the next section, I

address the influence of neoliberalism to further contextualize the diffusion of enterprise discourse across spheres and spaces of contemporary life and work.

Neoliberalism and the cultural fortification of enterprise. The pervasiveness of enterprise can be contextualized by understanding neoliberalism as a cultural philosophy that undergirds talk about being enterprising by naturalizing the omnipresence of free market capitalism. According to political anthropologist David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism in its base form is a theory of sociopolitical economy that “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). At the institutional level, Harvey (2005) argues that neoliberalism has dominated Western political-economic thought and praxis since the 1970s. However, the dominance of neoliberalism as a mode of discourse facilitates its expansion beyond government and institutional action. Indeed, the neoliberal mindset has been assimilated into the enterprising way that many Western individuals make sense of their working and living worlds (Harvey, 2005), appearing as a natural part of their economic *and* social spheres of experience.

Furthermore, neoliberal philosophies engender active processes of *neoliberalization*, a socioeconomic project bent on “creative destruction” that shifts institutional frameworks, strengthens labor divisions, and reorders social relations according to the values of the market (Harvey, 2005). Through neoliberalization, market exchange rises above, obscures, and seemingly replaces all other human ethics and guides for action, including religious beliefs. Thus, neoliberalism equates the

achievement of social good with the maximization of the scope and frequency of being enterprising as a mode of human life and interaction (Harvey, 2005). In sum, the project of neoliberalization seeks the total alignment of human experience, including religious practices, with the symbolic and material features of the market.

To underpin enterprise as a form of occupational identity regulation, the first move of neoliberalism is to identify government intervention on entrepreneurial activity as a fatal societal flaw (Doolin, 2002). To rectify this problem, neoliberalism proposes the entrepreneurial working individual as an ideal solution. Moreover, as Doolin (2002) points out, enterprise is mobilized at the organizational level by defining excellent organizations as those that generate autonomous, entrepreneurial work behavior at the collective and individual levels. Ultimately, then, neoliberalism obligates the individual as responsible for replacing personal ethics with the ethics of entrepreneurship in the interest of organizational excellence and social welfare.

What is perhaps most insidious about neoliberal rationality is its ability to coopt the *language* of work to disguise market order as a cross-cultural revolution, rather than a philosophical shift confined to the realm of corporate work (du Gay, 1996). To bolster the umbrella of enterprise through communication, neoliberalism infuses our everyday talk with the vocabulary of the free market. Through a neoliberal language filter, for example, organizations and individuals must continually pursue the adoption of an “enterprising spirit” (du Gay, 1996, p. 58). In this way, neoliberalism positions economic revival as a natural and entrepreneurial effect of cultural growth, thereby moralizing

entrepreneur/ship and normalizing work as the prevailing mode of thinking and talking about human experiences.

It is by centralizing the free market within our vocabulary that neoliberalism firmly and specifically speaks into our work lives and organizes our occupational identities according to idealized notions of the entrepreneur. As neoliberalism, enterprise, and excellence coalesce into a seemingly organic ecosystem of organizing, they rearticulate the worker's relationship to work in terms of productivity, flexibility, profitability, and entrepreneurial *innovation* (du Gay, 1996). The latter concept is crucial to the success of enterprise as a subjectifying discourse at work. Enterprise reimagines innovation as a working ideal by engaging the self-fulfilling impulses of working individuals (Rose, 1989). Thus, the primary effect of enterprise is not only the conflation of work with innovation, but also the glorification of work as a means for self-fulfillment into entrepreneur/ship, as if work *were* our religion (du Gay, 1996). Coupled with the ideology of excellence, then, enterprise becomes a daily neoliberal reminder that the path to economic profit and the path to entrepreneurial self-development are the same (du Gay, 1996).

Finally, as the neoliberal revision of culture promotes enterprise as a set of moral criteria for work and organizing, it facilitates organizational control. In a discursive sense, organizational control hinges upon the effectiveness of managerial discourse about work and organization (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Crucially, "effective" control is accomplished not by forceful employee management, but instead through *identity regulation*, or "the self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired

discourses about work and organization” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 620). In other words, the goal of contemporary organizations can be seen as transforming the discourse of “the company” to the discourse of “we”, and exercising control by engendering internal reconfigurations of identity in employees, such that those identities are organizational first, and individual second. As neoliberalism buttresses enterprise such that the economic and cultural aspects of work and life are de-differentiated, the identity of the worker is relocated as the target *and* the origin of organizational control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

As we begin to filter the effects of neoliberalism and enterprise discourse through an occupational identity lens, the form and function of the entrepreneur as an idealized occupational self starts to take shape. Ultimately, enterprise calls our occupational selves into symbolic alignment with entrepreneur/ship and encourages material innovation in response to diverse consumer demands (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). Thus, the symbolic form and material function of enterprise is embodied in the entrepreneur (Larson & Pearson, 2012), whose image is exalted across economic and cultural discourses as an occupational hero (Gill, 2013; Sørensen, 2008). Following from Ashcraft (2013), then, we can better understand how enterprise discourse manifests and mobilizes the image of the entrepreneur to organize occupational identities by investigating the various social identities that come to be normatively associated with certain forms of work, including church planter work (Gill, 2013). In the following section, I develop occupational identity as a conceptual lens through which to view and theorize the experience of work at the intersection of enterprise and religion.

Occupational Identity: Constructing the Working Self

As a guiding concept, *occupational identity* helps us develop a better sense of the way that organizing discourses, including enterprise, religion, and entrepreneur/ship, influence work experiences. According to Cheney and Ashcraft (2007), as important markers of social identity, occupations or professions serve as discursive resources that help individuals narrate a sense of self, all the while organizing other social identities, including race, class, sexuality, religion, and gender. Moreover, the way we think about the identity of our occupation becomes central to the experience of job performance (Ashcraft, 2005); that is, what we think about who *should* do our work deeply influences how we feel about our work, how we assess our ability to do good work, and how we present bodies capable of doing work.

Fitting the glass slipper. As Ashcraft (2013) suggests through her metaphor of the *glass slipper*, occupational identities are indefinite social constructions that come to represent complex linkages between prevailing discourses, the practical features of work, and the enacted construction and embodiment of identity. Occupational identity operates communicatively, then, by fueling worker narratives about what counts as work, what types of work matter, and who should do certain forms of work; in other words, according to the glass slipper, occupational identities emerge in a discursive struggle over answers to *what* a line of work is and *who* is conceived of as “fitting” the occupation – that is, *who figuratively fits the glass slipper* (Ashcraft, 2005). Thus, the glass slipper dictates that we come to know occupations based on identifying *who* “normally” does certain tasks, rather than simply recognizing the tasks an occupation

accomplishes (Ashcraft, 2013). In this, the discursive function of occupational identity as a carrier of work narratives is coupled with and complemented by its status as an indefinite and seemingly indefinable rhetorical act, wherein the working self is expressed as a communicative response to the lived experiences and material possibilities of work (Ashcraft, 2007). Our images of *who* should do a certain job spans macro- and micro-level organizational messages and actors, organizing and segregating work by privileging certain identity discourses (Ashcraft, 2007). Moreover, through their intersections with social discourses, narratives about work also shape occupational bodies as both a medium and an outcome of occupational knowledge and practice (Trethewey et al., 2006).

Ashcraft (2005) distinguishes between occupational identity *communication* (i.e., the micro-practice of enacting a job and making sense of our everyday work roles) from occupational identity *discourse* (i.e., the publicly known image and essence of the job and those who should perform it,) by highlighting how *communication negotiates discourse* in the material context of daily work life. To manage the precarity and ambiguity of constructing and enacting occupational identities, individuals often draw upon images of an occupational ideal that is shaped by social and organizational discourses (Fraher & Gabriel, 2014). Thus, occupational identities take on symbolic and material form as people communicatively adopt the image of a working self while carrying out specific work tasks (Ashcraft, 2005). Moreover, occupational roles and images are held in a potent, iterative tension with notions of the self; as work roles

influence identity, they are also formed and made meaningful in occupational identity work that draws upon occupational images (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2008).

A communicative perspective of occupational identity highlights the social nature of constructing occupational images. Taken as a set of discursive and material processes, Cheney & Ashcraft (2007) suggest that the professional and occupational come to be known not by their structural positions, but by the way they prefer, enforce, and renegotiate certain aspects of social identity. This approach necessarily defines work as a process of social organizing that results from collaborative efforts between individuals, and that occur within and across public and private spheres of life (Broadfoot et al., 2008). Thus, the symbolic and material consequences of enterprise discourse (and religion, gender, and other identity-structuring discourses) for certain forms of work and occupational identity emerge as people communicate about the work they do.

Occupational identities can also be viewed as attempts to reconcile contradictory experiences of work and difference. While organization scholars have identified work as a fundamental and consistent source of self-identity (du Gay, 1996), as well as an important source of personal worth and social affiliation (Doherty, 2009), others importantly point to the ways in which work identities become organized by communication that seems to normalize other embodied social identities (Ashcraft, 2005). In other words, while talk about work serves occupational identity construction in the workplace (Knights, 1990), so does talk about gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and other forms of difference. And, given that identity is often

precarious and contemporary work performances are often ambiguous (Alvesson, 1994), assumptions about occupational normativity become even more relevant to the construction and expression of a coherent occupational identity (McDonald, 2015).

Finally, at the conceptual and practical levels, occupational identity can also be distinguished from organizational identity through the construction and expression of identity narratives according to *what* we do rather than *where* we do it (Ashcraft, 2013). As *what* an occupation does can change and exceed a sense of *where* work is done, occupational identities can be seen as evolving, plural constructions of the working self (Meisenbach, 2008). This is not to suggest that the places where work is done are not important for knowing the experience of work, but rather to position occupational identity as a useful lens for highlighting how enterprise, religion, and entrepreneur/ship are actively entwined with everyday work activities, such that the expression of occupational identity can be understood as it occurs within *and* across myriad places where life and work are done. In the next section, I consider more deeply how the increasingly universal expression of enterprise prescribes the image of the entrepreneur as an ideal occupational identity that transcends boundaries between work and non-work experiences.

Entrepreneur/ship and occupational identity. As a conceptual framework, occupational identity helps us understand how enterprise works on work: by encouraging all workers, regardless of “station”, to be entrepreneurial, and by celebrating the individual pursuit of entrepreneur/ship. Indeed, the proliferation of enterprise as a macrosocial system of meaning in the United States has resulted in practitioners and the

academy alike paying significant attention to the entrepreneur as an idealized category of occupational identity. I follow from Gill (2013) in my usage of the specific word form *entrepreneur/ship* to indicate reference to both *entrepreneur* and *entrepreneurship*. By speaking of entrepreneur/ship, we make visible the claim that the traditional distinction between the entrepreneur as an occupational person and entrepreneurship as an organizing activity is problematic. Moreover, it seems appropriate for an investigation of blurred intersections between enterprise and religion to conceive of the two as woven together and often indistinguishable (Gill, 2011). After all, this conception mirrors and calls into question the claims enterprise discourse makes to characterize occupational identities as indistinct from organizational realities.

Though entrepreneur/ship has maintained an identifiable presence in organization research, including studies of entrepreneurs who also practice a religious faith, the majority of these studies assume the functionalist philosophy that entrepreneurial traits are inherently individual, yet they always play out in organizations (Goss, Jones, Betta, & Latham, 2011; Jennings, Perren, & Carter, 2005). Indeed, significant portions of entrepreneur/ship research can be broadly categorized according to one of two conceptual foci: first, attribute-centered attempts to identify and typologize the typical entrepreneur (Carland, Hoy, Carland, 1988); and second, task-oriented approaches toward defining what it is that entrepreneurs do to distinguish them from non-entrepreneurs – specifically, the creation of new organizations through innovative business practices (Gartner, 1988; Greenman, 2011; Watson, 2013). To follow this functionalist approach is to turn our gaze fully upon organizations, such that the

individual worker can only be understood through the experience of the organization as a whole.

Studies of religious entrepreneur/ship have also largely relied on mainstream functionalist conceptions of entrepreneurial work. Within this limited body of research, religious entrepreneurs are often characterized as commercial actors who possess religious or spiritual values in the workplace (Balog et al., 2014), and religious entrepreneurship is typically understood by the degree to which religious beliefs facilitate, promote, and motivate entrepreneurialism as an occupational choice (Audretsch et al., 2013; Dougherty et al., 2013; Ferguson et al., 2014; Kraybill, Nolt, & Wesner, 2011; La Barbera, 1992; Nwankwo & Gbadamosi, 2013; Yancey & Emerson, 2003; Zelekha et al., 2014). Ultimately, functionalist analyses of entrepreneur/ship are unlikely to support divergent reflections on intersections between religion and enterprise at work (da Costa & Saraiva, 2012).

Even as organization scholars endeavor to develop new perspectives that think of entrepreneur/ship as dynamic, complex, and subjective, we often resort to characterizing the entrepreneur in definite idealistic terms, such as *forward-thinking*, *visionary*, *creative*, *innovative*, *market-oriented*, *self-organizing*, and so forth (Chiles, Tuggle, McMullen, Bierman, & Greening, 2010). For example, in their analysis of *novelty* as a central theme of entrepreneurship, Chiles et al. (2010) conflate the term with “originality, difference, innovation – *qualities inherent in the unique human actions an entrepreneur’s imagination sets in motion*” (p. 13; emphasis added). By characterizing entrepreneur/ship as a market-driven phenomenon of work taken up only by certain

individuals with special enterprising traits, we normalize assumptions that entrepreneur/ship is objectively positive and moral work behavior, while bounding it as the occupational domain of the enterprising few. Moreover, we could argue that this perspective further mobilizes the neoliberal claim that the widespread adoption of entrepreneurialism will improve sociocultural life (Calas, Smircich, & Bourne, 2009; Goss, 2005; Hjorth & Steyaert, 2004; Tedmanson, Verduyn, Essers, & Gartner, 2012; Weiskopf & Steyaert, 2009).

On the other hand, critical approaches to entrepreneur/ship view the contemporary worker as variously enabled *and* constrained by efforts to draw upon competing social and organizational discourses at work (Gill & Ganesh, 2007; Goss, 2010; Goss et al., 2011; Steyaert & Hjorth 2007; Steyaert and Katz 2004; Tedmanson et al., 2012). Moreover, critical examinations of contemporary work reveal how the discourses of enterprise and excellence restructure organizing as post-hierarchical and entrepreneurial, encouraging self-direction and self-management at work (Gill & Ganesh, 2007). From here, entrepreneur/ship can be seen as exemplifying neoliberal work ideals by casting the entrepreneur as the emblem of the capitalist spirit (Rose & Miller, 1992), increasingly valorized in the United States as a means of competition in labor markets marked by instability and uncertain compensation (da Costa & Saraiva, 2012; Gill & Ganesh, 2007).

From a more critical *communicative* position, then, we can consider how entrepreneur/ship organizes an “entrepreneurial hierarchy” through narratives about occupational identities in contemporary work contexts. This hierarchy is presided over

by those assumed to be capable of responsibly using and abiding by the language and features of the market – namely, the educated, white, and professional middle and upper classes (da Costa & Saraiva, 2012) – while those workers who do not align with these identity criteria are delegitimized and marginalized (Gill, 2014). Moreover, as the image of the heroic white male entrepreneur becomes the token of neoliberal promises of equality and profitability, an entrepreneurial view of the working self comes to be socially admired and celebrated as an occupational choice (Gill, 2014). Indeed, “celebratory talk” about entrepreneur/ship *as* work mobilizes the image of the entrepreneurial ideal across noncommercial occupational spaces, including schools, government offices, and nonprofit and religious organizations (du Gay, 1996). Thus, as noncommercial workplaces are reimagined as enterprises, the noncommercial worker – such as the church planter – may experience an obligation to entrepreneur/ship, even as noncommercial work identities are often denied “entrepreneurial status” (du Gay, 1996). Consequently, multiple forms of work in an enterprise culture become parties to the practical outgrowth of an entrepreneurial hierarchy (da Costa & Saraiva, 2012).

Certainly, the “exaltation of the entrepreneurial spirit” is not meant for confinement within organizations; instead, it is the very aim of the neoliberal revolution to idolize the entrepreneur as a *moral* occupational model, and through talk that valorizes entrepreneur/ship, to disseminate entrepreneurial images of work throughout society (Armstrong, 2005; da Costa & Saraiva, 2012, p. 591; De Clercq & Voronov, 2009). Thus, the image of the heroic entrepreneurial man opens the cultural umbrella of enterprise and holds it above other political and socioeconomic discourses (Gill, 2013),

trying to shade in the gaps between (non)work identity fragments while also encouraging individuals to criticize, devalue, or reconfigure systems of thought that might not normally be seen as entrepreneurial. It is tempting, then, to look to the heroic entrepreneurial man as the solid, visible center of work and entrepreneur/ship; however, as Jones and Spicer (2005) remind us, entrepreneur/ship is not a stable vision of work *because it hinges upon* enterprise as a discursive and therefore contestable center.

Like enterprise, then, entrepreneur/ship represents a paradoxical work construct that seemingly objectifies a subject position that can never be fully realized by the worker (Jones & Spicer, 2005). Indeed, even as the heroic entrepreneurial man suffuses organizational and occupational identities as an enterprising archetype, entrepreneur/ship remains a fragmented ideological construct (Gill, 2013). Nonetheless, as workers narrate work identities by drawing upon various discursive intersections underneath the umbrella of enterprise, they are implored to press on in pursuit of entrepreneur/ship, that nonexistent endpoint where they might finally take up the “mantle of enterprise” (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008, p. 389). We are left to wonder, then, how the neoliberal appropriation of entrepreneur/ship as moral work weighs upon religious workers, such as church planters in the United States, who might be thought of as individuals whose work is to create local organizations that promote a noncommercial form of morality in an enterprise culture. In the next section, I turn my attention toward contemporary religious work and organizing to further highlight enterprise as a discourse that spans sites of work and occupational identity construction.

Religion at Work, Religion as Work

A significant and complex intersection exists in the sociocultural space shared by enterprise and contemporary religion. While research has considered how people who are religious do various forms of work (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Molloy & Heath, 2014), few scholars have taken an interest in the ways that people experience forms of work that are explicitly religious. Moreover, perceptions of an unproblematic linkage between enterprise ideology and religious orthodoxy linger in organization studies, a perspective due in no small part to the profound influence of Max Weber (1930/2008). As calls for reconceptualizing religious organizing as a dynamic, situated practice continue to emerge (Koschmann, 2013; Shenoy-Packer & Buzzanell, 2013), and given the sociocultural shift away from traditional denominationalism toward mobilized evangelicalism as a predominant mode of American Christian organizing and religious work (Chaves, 2011), I suggest that this is an appropriate time for a more careful investigation of how religion and enterprise are communicatively constructed and enacted to shape religious occupational selves across spheres of work and life (Gill, 2013).

Drawing attention to religious work. As this review has established, through entrepreneur/ship as its occupational manifestation, enterprise discourse comes to regulate and replace diverse social ethics, such as religious beliefs, with the values of work, such that sociocultural expectations of distinction between the personal and the organizational diminish (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). Thus, as organization scholars consider how individuals communicate about their selves in

relation to their work, there has been a growing emphasis on diverse sites of contemporary work, including “the home, house of worship, backyard studio, and playground” (Broadfoot et al., 2008, p. 154; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). Yet as we attempt to theorize changes in the relationship between work and the self across diverse societal sectors, certain forms of identity difference have been granted secondary status in our storytelling. As I will argue here, religious identities have received relatively little meaningful attention as sites of occupational identity construction and material practice in work and organizational contexts.

Religion is particularly absent from the recent body of communication literature surrounding occupational and entrepreneurial identities, and thus we are left with little knowledge of religious work as a communicative doing. Organization scholars have gravitated toward a focus on intersections between identity discourses that appear to be more widely applicable at work, including race, education, and gender (Alvesson, 1998; Ashcraft, 2007; Kuhn, 2006b). For example, Ashcraft (2005) claims that “diverse sites of communication organize labor identity”; yet only “gender, race, class, and sexuality become relevant players in the organizing process” (p. 74). Trethewey, Scott, and LeGreco (2006) argue that the discursive “entrepreneurial project of the self remains gendered and classed”. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) describe how occupations demarcate social identities to help people narrate a coherent self and to manage other aspects of identity, which the authors name as gender, race, and class. In their study of place as a discursive resource, Larson and Pearson (2012) suggest that the materiality and symbolism of place allow entrepreneurs to construct, manage, and frame “particular

gendered, raced, and classed occupational identities” (p. 261). According to Gill and Larson (2014), as entrepreneur/ship research examines “the construction of an occupational identity for entrepreneurs”, scholars investigate how this identity intersects with “a variety of discourses, including gender, class and race/ethnicity” (p. 519). Finally, to return to perhaps the most striking example, Broadfoot et al. (2008) claim that “economic discourses and everyday discursive interactions and material realities cannot be disentangled from issues of race-ethnicity, gender, class, *and to lesser extents*, religion and sexuality” (p. 155; emphasis added).

To be fair, Gill and Larson (2014) point out that the current body of occupational identity and entrepreneur/ship literature only partially accounts for the multiple ways that entrepreneurial and occupational identities manifest across the United States. However, when we do manage to include religion on our lists of social identity discourses that become entwined with occupational identity, it is typically last in sequences that look like this: “ethnicity and national origin, sexuality, ability, age, and religion” (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 9). By burying religion beneath other identity discourses, we construct a disembodied, one-dimensional image of the religious worker and invalidate what religious work experiences might teach us about doing work and storying work identities in an enterprise culture (Chasserio, Pailot, & Poroli, 2014).

Following from Dempsey (2012), I suggest that like nonprofit organizations, our understanding of religious work and organizations as *spiritually* separated from “market forces” must be challenged; indeed, religious organizations are not immune to marketization, and have uniquely problematic forms of labor segregation (Dempsey,

2012, p. 148). Enterprise-driven forces of professionalization in both nonprofit and religious organizing may lead to interesting tensions between production, capital accumulation, and religious beliefs about success and wealth (Meisenbach, 2008). In any case, I suggest that as religious and nonprofit organizations increasingly adopt the logics and methods of for-profit enterprise, we can look toward their associated occupational identities to better understand how enterprise may become organizationally and occupationally embedded in work (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010).

Importantly, a communicative approach helps us to think about the effects of enterprise discourse for both nonprofit and religious work based on the lived experiences of nonprofit and religious workers, and not simply the organizational status of such entities (Koschmann, 2013; Sanders, 2012; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). From this perspective, two central organizing tensions emerge. First, the contradictory nature of contemporary religious organizing becomes apparent, as religious workers must manage the pull between the profit-based motives of the market and a divinely inspired organizational mission (Sanders, 2012). Secondly, brought into focus are the ways religious workers experience the tension of weaving together contrasting discourses while attempting to maintain a coherent occupational identity narrative (Jones, Latham, & Betta, 2008). This dissertation attempts to understand these tensions by observing their enactment and expression on a local level by individuals who work within them.

Ultimately, assuming a dynamic view of religious faith, practice, and identity means questioning characterizations of religion as an unchanging attribute of religious organizations or individuals. Indeed, even my earlier critique about the prominence of

religion in literary lists of differences operates from a categorical approach that obscures communication processes and does not adequately foreground how different people might enact or resist normative religious organizing practices (McDonald, 2015). Thus, repositioning religion as central to normative constructions that emerge in ongoing symbolic and material interactions leaves room for nuance in our explanations of religious organizing and work. Moreover, a dynamic view of religion as a situated communication practice helps us understand how church planters construct notions of self that are positioned in relation to both faith and work (Koschmann, 2013). In this, this project calls our attention back to religion in organization studies by investigating how religion more or less entwines with enterprise and entrepreneur/ship to influence religious work experiences. In the following sections, I continue to develop my focus the experience of religious work as it occurs at the occupational intersection of enterprise discourse and religion, and turn my focus toward Christianity as the specific religious context for this study.

Religious organizations and occupational identities. The study of religious organizations is perhaps most extensive in the field of sociology, where institution-level approaches to understanding religious organizing are common (see Warner, 1993). For example, the sociological study of the religious economy theorizes the large-scale behavior of religious organizations, characterizing them as suppliers of religious products to a rational consumer base in a religious marketplace (see Froese, 2001; Stark & Iannaccone, 1994; Wilde, 2010). However, like the term “nonprofit”, we could argue that “religion” as a category of organization is problematic because it can obscure the

subjective economic, political, and social relations that religious organizations and workers must navigate in their everyday work practices (Dempsey, 2012; McDonald, 2015). Broadly, then, I follow organizational communication scholars in taking up a *dynamic/situated* approach to the study of religious organizations (see Koschmann, 2013), where I view religion not as a bounded form of organization, but as an intersubjective and interactive field of social, organizational, and occupational meanings (Buzzanell & Harter, 2006; Chang, 2003). This approach is useful because it enables us to characterize religious organizing, identity, and meaning as emerging in ongoing symbolic and material interactions (Shenoy-Packer & Buzzanell, 2013). Moreover, through a dynamic/situated lens, we can view (religious) work and occupational identities as enacted in situated communication practices guided by organizing discourses, including enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, and normativity (Koschmann, 2013; McDonald, 2015; Molloy & Heath, 2014).

Religious identity can be defined as “the component of one’s self that claims faith in or connection to a supernatural entity, force, or being” (McNamee, 2011, p. 424-425). And, like other social identities, “religion is not ‘left at home’; it infuses working life” (Essers & Benschop, 2009, p. 404). Indeed, for religious workers, the faithful component of the self becomes part of the social construction contest over the identity of their work (Ashcraft, 2013). Though an incomplete definition, I generally use the term *religious worker* to refer to individuals who “perform spiritual functions associated with beliefs and practices of religious faiths, providing motivation, guidance, and training in religious life for the people of a congregation, parish, or community” (Bickerton et al.,

2014, p. 371). The spiritual functions performed as work by religious workers might include preaching, teaching, administrating over congregational issues, spiritual counseling, and, as I will suggest, church planting. Religious workers, then, can be said to form a distinct yet loosely defined occupational subculture (Kuhn, Golden, Jorgenson, Buzzanell, Berkelaar, Kisselburgh, Kleinman, & Cruz, 2008; Bickerton et al., 2014), wherein they draw upon a *divine calling* as a legitimizing discursive resource. Defined as “a summons to a particular work activity that originates from a transcendent sacred source”, the calling of the religious worker is said to increase a sense of purpose at work, promote confidence to accomplish religious work tasks, and enhance resilience on the job – features that resemble popular claims about entrepreneur/ship (Bickerton et al., 2014, p. 372; Hall & Chandler, 2005).

While religious faith and spirituality has typically been associated with the private self, recognition of the increasingly indistinct space between work and the self has led to a growing awareness that religious individuals are likely to carry religion across the blurry threshold between self and organization (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Lair, Shenoy, McClellan, & McGuire, 2008). Moreover, guided by the spirit of free market capitalism, contemporary organizations – religious or otherwise – may embrace and normalize aspects of religious faith and spirituality, including the notion of the divine calling; indeed, by capitalizing on the calling as a “spiritual resource” for work engagement, organizations position work as religiously purposed but organizationally productive (Bickerton et al., 2014). The result is the continued blurring of public/private

identity boundaries by linking work activities and organizational values with what may have previously been private religious meanings (Lair et al., 2008).

As the spirit of capitalism sets an enterprising mood for identity construction, the doing of work becomes a key player in our individual struggles for self-coherence (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). For religious workers, however, finding meaning in work can become paradoxical; for example, even as the capitalist spirit beckons religious workers to identify with their career over a religious organization, the meaning of religious work is often prescribed and authorized by the local organization for which they work (Chang, 2003). Thus, the construction of religious occupational identities can become a discursive push-and-pull, where local sites of self-identity and expressions of meaningful work are simultaneously mediated by organizing religious discourses and culturally prevalent images of the capitalist entrepreneur.

Problematically, organization scholars have seldom considered how the possible paradoxes of doing religious work in an enterprise culture play out in the everyday lives of religious workers. Thus, the insights that existing research has contributed here are limited, including functionalist analyses of clergy managing religious identity to optimize work performance (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006), and some critical observations of workers enacting sexual identities in religious professional contexts (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010). One shortcoming of contemporary research on religion and work is a tendency to characterize religious workers as organizational subjects who happen to be religious, rather than investigating what it means to identify as someone who does religion *at* and *as* work; for example, we can think of church planters as both

carrying religious faith into their work, and doing their work as an enactment of their faith. There is room, then, for research like this dissertation that takes a more interpretive, critical, and contextual approach to understanding how religious workers communicatively negotiate the discursive paradoxes and material realities of daily work (Shenoy-Packer & Buzzanell, 2013).

Due to its increasingly visible and valued presence as a work activity and identity within American evangelicalism, this dissertation investigates *church planter* as an occupational identity and church planting as an emerging form of *Christian* religious work (see Johnson, 2010; Shibley, 1998). Within contemporary Christian discourse, the meanings of work and the definition of the worker are far from universal; instead, these meanings often vary by denomination, where organizational authority is often said to override occupational authority (Chang, 2003). Perhaps the most interesting feature of Christian religious work, then, is the lack of a “professional class of clergy” or occupational associations that establish professional norms or practices above the organizational level (Chang, 2003, p. 131). The key assumption here is that the occupational identity of the Christian worker, including the definition of the work that they do, can be characterized by its inability to transcend the occupational privileges granted by a local religious organization. Indeed, researchers have noted that American Christian denominations do not even share a common set of labels for describing religious workers or their work (Chang, 2003). However, this assumption is problematized by the phenomenon of church planting, where the occupation of the church planter comes to exist before the establishment of the local religious organization

for which they do their work. Moreover, by focusing too intently on religious work tasks, we run the risk of obscuring how religious workers enact their faith concomitantly with other organizing discourses, including enterprise, to construct occupational identities. Thus, this dissertation challenges assumptions about the enactment and expression of Christian occupational identities and work.

Importantly, a few key critical reflections on Christianity, work, and enterprise are present in organization studies with a communication or language focus. Perhaps the most significant example is Holmer Nadesan's (1999) critical deconstruction of popular business periodicals that support and tell stories about corporate applications of spiritual and religious discourses. Mobilized by evangelical Christianity as a therapeutic rhetoric, Holmer Nadesan (1999) describes the *discourse of evangelical capitalism* as privileging workplace entrepreneurialism; specifically, evangelical capitalism attempts to adapt individuals to shifting work environments by explaining success as a result of individual autonomy and initiative. Interestingly, Holmer Nadesan (1999) argues that evangelical capitalism proposes that public/private contradictions can be mitigated by a new moral order characterized by hard work, individual freedom, and patriotism. In a more recent textual analysis, Lindenbaum (2013) links religious discourse in contemporary Christian music (CCM) lyrics to the cultivation of autonomous, entrepreneurial subjects through behavioral self-regulation. Specifically, Lindenbaum (2013) argues that evangelical discourse in CCM reinforces neoliberal subjectivities by promoting an ethos of individualism and personal responsibility for faith, while denying the influence of collective structural processes on successfully realizing a personal relationship with God.

However, notwithstanding their contributions to theorizing the linkages between religious discourse, entrepreneur/ship, and the workplace, these textual analyses are limited by their inability to describe the ways in which people experience “moments of enterprise” during religious work and organizing as dynamic, situated practices.

Conversely, in an ethnographic study with the pastors, staff, and members of a large Baptist church, McNamee (2011) demonstrates that the discursive relationship between individual religious identities and faith-based work identities is marked by conflict and complexity. Specifically, McNamee (2011) describes the evangelical Christian sense of a personal connection to God as generative of tensions within collective, organization-level identities, such as church pastor or congregational leader. Moreover, as pastors in the study perform the dual roles of administrator and spiritual leader, their narrative representations of identity shape the ways they experience religious organizing, and vice versa (McNamee, 2011). While McNamee’s (2011) ethnographic project speaks to the tension of simultaneously identifying as religious and organizational in a large, established church context, we are still left with questions regarding how religious workers in emerging contexts, such as church plants, communicate about and experience their everyday work in relation to culturally prevalent organizing discourses and occupational identities, including enterprise and entrepreneur/ship. To construct a better framework for how this dissertation responds to those questions, I further contextualize this study in the following section by analyzing the historical relationship between Christianity, evangelicalism, and capitalism in the United States.

Christianity and capitalism in the United States. In a historical sense, enterprise discourse has been conceptually linked with religious work since Weber (1930/2008) attributed much of the rise of capitalism in the early United States to the influence of Protestant Christianity. Specifically, Weber (1930/2008) posited that the Protestant ethic of Calvinism, through which wealth can be seen as evidence of divine grace, encourages and justifies work in pursuit of capital accumulation and ownership (Murtola, 2012). Moreover, Weber (1930/2008) argued, Protestant Calvinism characterizes individuals as personally accountable to God for their way of life; thus, the Protestant ideology insists that individuals adopt a personal ethic of hard work, capital and time management, and innovation – each a cornerstone of the American capitalist spirit (Jones, Furnham, & Deile, 2010).

According to Murtola (2012), Weber's (1930/2008) conceptual linkages between enterprise discourse and religious work are made symbolically and materially visible in the United States through the increasing entanglement of capitalism, conservative Christianity, and neoliberal political ideals. Indeed, this morass of religion, economics, and politics has appeared in different ideological forms over time. For example, in the era surrounding the Industrial Revolution, the Protestant work ethic was repackaged with promises of class mobility as the so-called American Dream (Gill, 2014); in the late 1970s, as neoliberalism became the object of sociopolitical desire, the predominantly Protestant religious political right emerged to oppose secular humanism by reclaiming hard work and financial success as the domain of the spiritually moral (Murtola, 2012). Today, various forms of American Protestant and evangelical Christianity often appear

to blend together with the progress of capitalism (Harvey, 2005), such that the vocabulary of enterprise and neoliberal philosophy – e.g., the aforementioned *capitalist spirit* – takes on a religiously moral character in the form of the entrepreneur (Nelson, 2001; Benjamin, 1996).

The Weberian thesis has developed a strong academic presence that is sometimes implied yet often made explicit in studies of religion and enterprise. Holmer Nadesan (1999) suggests that even though contemporary sociocultural conditions result in myriad meanings for religion, spirituality, work, and entrepreneur/ship, the essence of Weber's argument highlights how entrepreneurial forms of religious practice remain useful for organizational growth and success. Indeed, the American Christian emphasis on an individual relationship with God has been shown to fuel self-coherence and self-esteem as driving forces of entrepreneur/ship (Nunziata & Rocco, 2014). Moreover, through the lens of the Protestant work ethic, the culture of individualism and achievement central to the worldview of entrepreneur/ship *appears* to align with Christian morals and religious work practices (Thomas & Mueller, 2000; Essers & Benschop, 2009). However, despite the longevity and usefulness of the Protestant ethic as a conceptual heuristic for religious organization studies, I suggest that the widespread adoption of this lens tends to reduce how religious workers experience work in an enterprise culture to a one-dimensional economic mode.

One body of research that underscores an increasingly high academic comfort level with the conflation of Christianity and capitalism is the aforementioned “religious economy” approach to the sociological study of religion (Warner, 1993). According to

Warner (1993), the fundamental premise of the religious economy as a conceptual system is that *organized religion in the U.S. thrives in an open-market system*; what is important from this view, then, is the notion that religious organizations are primarily motivated by (a) the entrepreneurial satisfaction of diverse (religious) consumer preferences and (b) the non-guarantee of financial stability or organizational survival. Furthermore, from this perspective, we can view *disestablishment* and *mobilization* as the new organizing norms of the religious sector in the United States (Pfaff & Corcoran, 2012; Warner, 1993). Warner (1993) claims that these features of the American religious environment are most obvious when one considers how religion in the United States does not operate as a function of whole society. Herein, American Christianity can be thought of as an increasingly dynamic environment characterized by specialized forms of structurally flexible religious work and organizing, including church planting (Montgomery, 1996; Wollschleger & Porter, 2011).

However, though the religious economy approach is an important development toward more thoughtful theorizations of the intersections between religion and economic concepts, it can be said to effectively excuse both enterprise and religious discourse from critique by assuming that American religion *is* a marketplace (McKinnon, 2012). Indeed, by assuming the presence of a seamless relationship between American culture, Christianity, and capitalism, we mask important contradictions and paradoxes inherent to the construction and expression of occupational identities, religious or otherwise (Holmer Nadesan, 1999). Furthermore, by construing the intersection of religion and enterprise as a *natural* space (Molloy & Heath, 2014), we are more likely to assume their

unproblematic discursive coexistence and remain unaware of their symbolic and material effect on working bodies, places, and communities. Thus, we can begin telling more compelling stories about how religious workers do religious work by taking a situated view of contemporary religious organizing and occupational identities that is informed by, but not always theoretically bound to, the complex historical relationship between enterprise and religion in the United States (Koschmann, 2013; Murtola, 2012).

Church planting as religious work. There is no singular way to trace the historical emergence of church planting as a phenomenon of American Christianity, and specifically of American evangelicalism. However, it is helpful to think about mobilized forms of religious organizing like church planting as emergent responses to an American sociocultural context of disestablishment girded by economic discourses of enterprise and consumption (du Gay, 1996; Warner, 1993). As religion, like other noncommercial spheres of life and work, is brought under the umbrella of enterprise, religious organizations and individuals are increasingly exposed to discourses of excellence, branding, and aggressive competition (Finke & Stark, 2005; Warner, 1993); and, according to Chang (2003), the most successful Christian groups are those who have flexibly adapted their organizing strategies to match their *socioeconomic* context.

We can locate an example of structural adaptation in American Christian religious work by considering the Baptist and Methodist revivalists of the early nineteenth century. During this time period, these were the fastest growing Christian groups in the United States (Finke & Stark, 2005). Abandoning the traditional Anglican organizational norms of highly educated ministers and restricted geographic movement,

the Baptists and Methodists mobilized their evangelism through lay preachers who traveled across the frontier, creating a wave of religious revivals (Chang, 2003; Finke & Stark, 1992). Through the success of their entrepreneurial behavior, the revivalists saw efficiency in their work as a form of service to God; thus, as Chang (2003) argues, a market-oriented rationalization of entrepreneurial courage, risk-taking, and efficiency can be thought of as a hallmark of American evangelical success.

The revivalist image of the evangelical frontiersman continues to characterize contemporary evangelical identities and organizing. According to Shibley (1998), the term *evangelical* generally refers to a broad group of people whose Christian faith hinges first upon a “born-again” conversion experience and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ or God; secondly, an acceptance of the Bible as fully authoritative in all matters of life, including work and family; and thirdly (and perhaps most crucially), a commitment to sharing their faith publicly. It is the simultaneously public and personal nature of contemporary evangelical identity that has led to its transformation into a “world-affirming faith”; thus, in the United States, evangelical Christians are thought to be comfortable with the diversity of American life, such that they may strategically or unconsciously adopt American sociocultural values into their religious work and forms of organizing (Shibley, 1998, p. 84). In this sense, contemporary American evangelicalism can rationalize entrepreneur/ship and organizational innovation as pathways back to the revivalist frontier – an affirmation of the traditional roots of evangelical faith, as well as an enactment of the evangelical commitment to being publicly faithful. In sum:

If one accepts a religious worldview that seeks to engage and transform the world, then it seems to follow that pragmatism and entrepreneurialism are consequences of the religious spirit and cannot be categorized as inherently secular (Chang, 2003, p. 129).

It is not surprising, then, that some religious scholars have begun to observe contemporary evangelical organizations thriving outside of traditional denominational structures, underscoring numerical and financial success, and imitating entrepreneurial strategies for accomplishment (Johnson, 2010; Shibley, 1998; Wellman, 2004).

Indeed, contemporary American evangelicalism can even be thought of as post-hierarchical, as evangelical churches are typically organized around a charismatic leader and generally lack centralized authority relationships or denominational affiliations (Shibley, 1998). Moreover, many evangelical churches, and perhaps especially contemporary church plants, appear to follow revivalist patterns of mobilization by having no definite sacred meeting place. Instead, they meet in movie theaters, school auditoriums, warehouses, or vacant strip malls, infusing apparently secular places with their divine calling to a spiritual mission (Shibley, 1998). In this context, one can imagine that as contemporary evangelical Christians experience a calling to work, notions of enterprise may encourage the expression and enactment of this call through church planting as an entrepreneurial form of work and faith development (Godwin, 2011; Johnson, 2010; Shibley, 1998).

In keeping with the vision of evangelical revivalists conquering the entrepreneurial frontier, Hesselgrave and Blomberg (1980) describe church planting as

typically following one of two organizing patterns: the *pioneer* church plant, and the *nucleus* church plant. Pioneer church plants are said to start with almost no assistance, requiring a church planter capable of achieving spiritual production and organizational management simultaneously; on the other hand, nucleus church plants often branch off from a larger group of believers and rely on the support of another church who contributes people and financial resources (Godwin, 2011). In either case, church plants are typically thought of as autonomous bodies with the freedom to adapt faith and worship practices to their local contexts; and, while church plants may align with the doctrinal beliefs of a network or parent church, these support entities are themselves often free from denominational authority or oversight (Johnson, 2010).

While it seems easy to characterize church planting as religious franchising (Ritzer, 1996), doing so misrepresents contemporary evangelical motivations and oversimplifies how church planters experience and embody church planting as work (Miller, 1997; Shibley, 1998). As Miller (1997) suggests, as part of a new evangelical work paradigm, church planters believe they are responding to a spiritual calling in their efforts to start new churches. Thus, despite the apparent conceptual contiguity between entrepreneur/ship and church planters as contemporary evangelical frontiersmen, we must hold back on accepting the firmness of this construct, as the linearity of this theorization does not mirror the complex and contradictory reality of constructing and enacting *church planter* as an everyday occupational identity. Indeed, scholars have shown that other religious occupational identities are acted upon by a plurality of potentially competing discourses at work, including the seemingly indistinct roles of

spiritual guide, evangelical entrepreneur, and organizational manager (McNamee, 2011; Monahan, 1999); ideological commitments to faith and business practices (Molloy & Heath, 2014); organizational and occupational identification (Chang, 2003); and visions of the masculine religious worker as simultaneously a responsible, profitable family provider and a self-sacrificial servant of the church (Johnson, 2010). This dissertation demonstrates that church planters experience a similar and often confusing plurality of competing identity discourses at and away from work.

Ultimately, disrupting traditional assumptions about religion *at* work requires investigating how religion is variously and socially enacted with enterprise and other occupational discourses *as* work. Thus, I return to the claim I posed in Chapter One that *understanding church plants as organizations effectively begins with an understanding of the discursive essence and social enactment of the occupational identity that organizes them*. Religious or otherwise, contemporary occupational identities are being constructed in an era marked by post-hierarchical transformations in the symbolic imagery and material organization of work. Through these transformations, traditional organizational values of order and uniformity at work are replaced by the enterprising values of consumption, innovation, and personal entrepreneur/ship (Cheney, Lair, and Kendall, 2013; du Gay, 1996). And, as I have argued here, speaking to enterprise and work in local religious contexts requires challenging assumptions that religious work is either fully attuned to or exempt from the influence of enterprise discourse.

Emerging sites of evangelical religious work, including church plants, are said to grow out of concerns caused by late 20th century trends in religious organizing, such as

the declining population of Christian denominations, increasing misgivings about the role of megachurches, and uncertainty about the influence of postmodern philosophy (Johnson, 2010; Webber, 2007). However, scholars have yet to ask how and whether or not individuals doing the day-to-day work of religious organizing experience enterprising shifts toward entrepreneur/ship as they construct occupational identities and create new religious organizations. Moreover, thinking of work, enterprise, and the self through the entrepreneurial metaphor of *creation*, which is a theme central to Christian theology and faith, helps us to access intersections between religion and enterprise as sites of labor and identity expression (Fenwick, 2002). Thus far, this literature review has positioned this dissertation to ask questions about the emergence of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship in explanations and enactments of *church planter* as an occupational identity. However, because notions of identity remain foundational to this study, and may emerge as a key theme in analysis, in the next section I briefly frame my theoretical approach to understanding issues of identity and normativity in organizational life.

Identity Narratives and Intersectionality at Work

I give further attention to identity concepts here because identity is central to communicative explanations of social phenomena, and this study aims to characterize and investigate enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, religion, and work as entwined through communication. I follow from Kuhn (2006a) who draws from Giddens (1990) to define *identity* as “the conception of the self reflexively and discursively understood by the self” (p. 1340). In other words, identity refers to the continuing efforts of individuals to answer the questions ‘Who am I?’ and ‘How should I act?’ through contextual

interactions with people and discourses (Alvesson et al., 2008). On the ground floor, then, we can view identity as an amalgamation of context-sensitive, subjective meanings assembled through discursive experience. Framing my approach to identity here also begins to draw an eye toward the ethnographic methods I used to conduct this project, as clarifying how identities are narratively enacted by drawing upon discursive resources points toward particular choices in fieldwork.

Identity and discourse in organization studies. Discursive notions of identity remain fraught with ambiguity in organization research (Cheney, Christensen, & Dailey, 2013). As organization scholars have continually theorized identity, those who assume a discursive approach often conceive of identity as a precarious and political product of discursive activity (Ashcraft, 2005). Debates have also ensued within organization studies about what we mean by “discourse”, because what we mean by *discourse* influences what we come to know about *identity*. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) posited an important distinction between (*d*)iscourse as it refers to the study of talk and text in social practice, and (*D*)iscourses as enduring systems of thought (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). This distinction created a functional heuristic that remains useful for organization scholars who attempt to tease out the complex interplay between *what* we know about the self, and *how* we come to know the self. Ashcraft (2007) refers to this interplay as a representational system that (re)produces socially recognizable versions of people, organizations, and events. In this sense, discourses can be thought of as “raw material for symbolic action” (Alvesson, 1994, p. 558); and identities, then, can be seen as assemblages of raw discursive material made more or less coherent through interaction.

Because multiple discourses, such as enterprise and religion, compete for our attention, identities become fragmented and indefinite communicative products of discursive struggle. Individuals, then, are sensitive to but not wholly determined by discourses, and are always caught up in a contested process of *becoming* through contextual interactions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). As a contested process of self-knowledge, identity has also been theorized through the notion of *subjectivity* (Foucault, 1984). Subjectivities are said to be fluid identity positions generated through the communicative and practical (re)production of systems of thought, such as enterprise or religion (Holmer Nadesan, 2002). Critical studies of work subjectivities conducted by organization scholars have been influential in developing this concept. For example, Tracy and Trethewey (2005) argue that as work becomes more central to our lives, we must navigate powerful discourses that emanate from organizational contexts, including enterprise. Even as people exercise agency in their negotiation of multiple discourses, our identities become subjectified by those discourses in their use. Enterprise, then, is perhaps a prime example of the subjectifying power of discourse:

Discourses, such as that of enterprise, act upon the subjectivity of individuals, constituting the sense of what it is to be entrepreneurial, and constraining certain ways of thinking and acting, while opening up others. (Doolin, 2002, p. 375)

This view of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship as powerful players in the sociocultural struggle for occupational subjectivities is central to this study. However, this project also endeavors to highlight the ways in which working identities are locally constructed and enacted. In order to proceed with an eye toward understanding how individuals make

sense of and explain the complex and contradictory experience of contemporary work and organizing (Alvesson et al., 2008), I briefly turn my attention toward *narrative* as an important conceptual vehicle for identity construction at work.

The narrative construction of the self at work. A narrative approach to understanding identity construction considers the role of reflexivity during the assemblage of discursive material, which includes meanings and values distilled through everyday communication (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). According to Sveningsson & Alvesson (2008), as individuals attend to and engage with multiple discourses, we are made more or less aware of the fragmented nature of our identities; in response to this reflection, we marshal certain discourses to (re)construct a coherent identity narrative through self-representation. Through a narrative lens, then, identities emerge and are enacted through the communicative expression of a reflexively organized self-narrative, especially as the self is rooted in experience and comprised of competing discourses (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Moreover, narrative identity construction – that is, telling stories about our experiences using available and familiar discourses – is a “normative activity” that involves weaving socially acceptable identity images into our representations of self (Wieland, 2010). Additionally, the idea that occupational identities emerge in the “normative” narratives workers weave about them dovetails nicely with McDonald’s (2015) framework for knowing difference through expressions of normativity; thus, this dissertation focuses on investigating *church planter* as an occupational identity by analyzing the spoken and embodied narratives that the people who do church planter work create about their jobs as they do them.

The process of identity construction through narrative self-representation has been conceptualized as *identity work* (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Specifically, identity work refers to individuals engaging in the forming, maintaining, and revising of a precarious narrative of self-coherence using socially constructed discursive resources preferred and supplied by their organization (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Kuhn et al., 2008; Larson & Pearson, 2012). Thus, it is through identity work that individuals exercise agency in both the creative assemblage and more or less conscious resistance of available discourses into coherent identity stories. Wieland (2010) suggests that identity work in organizational contexts is supported by images of an *ideal self*, or culturally situated expectations for what a “good person” should be. Ideal selves highlight how narratives of the self are motivated by competing desires for individuality and acceptance (Wieland, 2010). Moreover, pursuing symbolic and material alignment with an ideal self legitimizes the presence of work beyond organizational boundaries and serves as discursive scaffolding necessary for the continuous achievement of a more or less coherent narrative of a working self (Brown & Toyoki, 2013; Phillips, 2012).

In the context of work, individuals may tell stories of identification with work in order to express social and situational belonging across multiple contexts (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Through an occupational identity lens, as individuals continually share stories of identification with work, the occupation itself takes on a normative collective identity associated with those who are symbolically and materially aligned with the occupational “ideal” (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). Ultimately, then, our work identities are ongoing discursive and material accomplishments that emerge

through reflexive communication about the relationship between the self and the day-to-day doing of work and life (Wieland, 2010). We might expect, then, that when individuals like church planters give accounts of work experiences, they also give us insight into their sense of self and how they make sense of the relationship between self and work (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008).

A narrative view of identity construction also draws attention to how organizing discourses, such as enterprise and religion, come to have material effect through the embodiment of their associated occupational identities. *Embodiment* refers to the ways in which the narrative construction of identity is simultaneously mediated through physically lived experiences; indeed, working identities are forged among mutually influential processes of language use and material circumstance (Ashcraft, 2013). In other words, “the body is not simply made sensible in talk and symbolism; it is the product of symbolism colliding with various physical limitations” (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 33).

Embodiment has become central to some studies of enterprise discourse because desirable enterprising identities cannot be achieved without a commodity to trade. And, as individuals make sense of the self at work by utilizing the vocabulary of enterprise in self-representation, they also turn to the body as a form of “cultural capital” that can be enacted through consumption and entrepreneur/ship (Trethewey et al., 2006, p. 127). Indeed, while the worker employs enterprise discourse for symbolic identity work, *enterprise discourse does body work* (Trethewey, 1999; Trethewey et al., 2006). That is, as individuals use the language of enterprise to construct coherent, credible work

identities, enterprise discourse also has a constraining effect on the management of their physical body by reimagining an ideal working body (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008). In other words, just as we might recognize enterprise, religion, and entrepreneur/ship through their emergence in language, we can also recognize the effects of these discourses by observing how workers present their bodies, work spaces, and other material features of their work while their work is done (Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). In the following section, I briefly consider normativity and intersectionality as final key elements of identity narratives that intersect with notions of religion and enterprise at work.

Intersectionality, normativity, and occupational identities. Thus far, this literature review has characterized the increasingly widespread usage of enterprise discourse as an invasion of market principles and entrepreneurial identities across myriad spheres of human life and work (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). It follows, then, that meaningful investigations of enterprise can occur within and across the symbolic and material spaces where multiple spheres of existence collide. Through an occupational identity lens, these investigations can be thought of as partially hinging upon the concept of *intersectionality*, or “the idea that social identities are mediated by one another” (McDonald, 2015, p. 313; see also Bruni et al., 2004; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Essers & Benschop, 2009). As a guiding concept, intersectionality connects occupational identities to broader social identity phenomena and contextualizes identity construction processes and power relations (Essers & Benschop, 2009).

Occupational identity, then, represents a productive conceptual nexus around

which to concentrate questions about intersectionality – and, more specifically, those intersections of social identities that come to be seen as “normal” at work (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Essers & Benschop, 2009; McDonald, 2015). Accordingly, this dissertation secondarily explores church planter assumptions about and expressions of normative identities as they emerge at the symbolic and material intersection of religion and enterprise. To focus on intersectionality here is to recognize how embodied social identities organize the nature and meaning of work roles while also serving as a sort of personal backdrop for the emotional experience of doing work (Ashcraft, 2005). For example, as a social identity that must be performed daily, gender involves the body with work. As people communicate using gendered notions of professionalism at work, they also draw upon, reproduce, and resist contradictory discourses about normative gendered bodily appearances in an effort to narrate acceptable occupational identities (Trethewey et al., 2006).

I take the position that both religion and enterprise are organizing discourses predicated upon preferred identity assumptions that privilege certain people who enact them while disadvantaging those who cannot or do not do so (McDonald, 2015). In this sense, self-representations that emerge at work are not comprised of distinct categories of difference stacked together; instead, they involve multifaceted identity norms, each playing out concomitantly with the others to actively organize occupational identities (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Essers Benschop, 2009; Trethewey et al., 2006). Within this framework, occupational identity work reveals the doing of work as involving the dynamic negotiation of numerous identity-shaping norms, including but not limited to

religion, gender, and race, which exist simultaneously and whose narrative formations shift according to our work and life contexts (Adib & Guerrier, 2003).

Therefore, as occupational identities take cues from organizing discourses, normative intersections such as masculinity/femininity may be articulated as “differences that make a difference” in the contextual reproduction of divisions of labor (Trethewey et al., 2006). Historically, religious discourses, such as the discourse of evangelical capitalism, tend to articulate the working ideal as masculine (Holmer Nadesan, 1999); however, a framework based on normativity encourages us not to precondition religion, enterprise, or entrepreneur/ship as more or less likely to reinforce certain gendered work identities (McDonald, 2015). Indeed, religious discourses are likely to carry gendered assumptions about what makes work meaningful, what constitutes “good work”, and who should do “moral” work outside the home (Bernstein, 1997). However, generating divergent insights about the influence of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship on (religious) occupational identities means staying open to multiple normative intersections that may emerge as key organizing mechanisms for identity narratives in these unique contexts.

Research Questions

This literature review positions this dissertation as an investigation into enterprise discourse as a cultural umbrella, underneath which enterprise is manifested via entrepreneur/ship as an influential occupational identity that shapes stories and experiences of work across sociocultural spheres. While contemporary religious occupational identities, such as *church planter*, may come to be shaped and contested by

enterprise and entrepreneur/ship, questions remain about how these discourses intersect together with assumptions about difference, and how privilege and disadvantage are related to the enactment of *church planter* (McDonald, 2015). Thus, in order to trace how intersections between religion and enterprise become more or less important in experiences of church planter work, I observed how church planters expressed the meaning of their work as they enacted and performed their jobs (Ashcraft, 2005; Ashcraft, Muhr, Rennstam, & Sullivan, 2012). In this way, this dissertation contributes fresh ideas about what constitutes work, how enterprise and entrepreneur/ship shape occupational identity narratives, how religious work is enacted as a situated practice, and how intersectionality plays out in the symbolic and material practice of work (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Shenoy-Packer & Buzzanell, 2013).

In accordance with the framework laid out in this literature review, this dissertation responds to three research questions. Research Question One asks, *how do church planters and texts about church planter identities explain and perform church planting as everyday work?* This question emerges from my foci on the necessity of knowing religion *at/as* work in order to develop a greater understanding of religion as an occupational dynamic that shapes everyday work tasks and meanings, and participates in the construction of contemporary working selves (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Koschmann, 2013; Shenoy-Packer & Buzzanell, 2013). Research Question Two asks, *how do church planters and texts about church planter identities employ religious and/or economic discourses to make claims about and construct a figurative practitioner?* This question is shaped by the issues I raised surrounding the simultaneous and perhaps contradictory

enactment of enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, and religion in and beyond contemporary workplaces; moreover, this question lends a discursive focus to my analysis and enables me to consider how figurative glass slipper effects emerge in the occupational identity narratives of church planters (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ashcraft, 2013; du Gay, 1996; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Finally, Research Question Three asks, *how do assumptions about difference intersect with and participate in the occupational identity work of church planters, and in the creation of texts about church planter identities?* This question contextualizes Research Question Two by foregrounding intersectionality and normativity in church planter constructions and enactments of figurative practitioners that are claimed to be “naturally” associated with certain social identities (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Essers & Benschop, 2009; McDonald, 2015).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION, AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I engage in a metatheoretical and methodological discussion regarding the way I sought to answer my research questions. To investigate experiences and expressions of *church planter* as an occupational identity, I conducted ethnographically inspired research with evangelical Christian church planters located across the United States. Before detailing my research design, I first draw from Tracy's (2013) metaphor of the paradigmatic toolkit to recognize that all researcher choices are constructive and deconstructive in their own ways. Thinking of metatheoretical commitments and research design choices through the toolkit metaphor is useful because it reinforces a vision of research as a *craft*, thereby making room for blurry boundaries and the mystery of experience (Cunliffe, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to describe how I crafted this project, I first discuss my overarching intersubjectivist research approach, including the epistemological and ontological commitments that accompany it, and how I engaged with reflexivity in ethnographic research. I also weave my philosophical commitment to a relationally responsive social constructionism into this discussion. In the second portion of this chapter, I discuss the mechanics of my data collection and analysis, comment on reflexivity in that process, and provide a brief overview of my analysis chapters.

Metatheoretical Positioning

At a broad level, I position myself within the region of thought that Cunliffe (2011) describes as the *intersubjectivism problematic*. In general, subjective approaches assume that there is no objective reality independent of human experience and interpretation, and that our knowledge of the world can only be partial, as our experiences are shaped by shared cultural and historically located meanings (Allen, 2005; Tracy, 2013). However, a key distinction between *intersubjectivism* and *subjectivism* is a focus on “we-ness”, or the recognition that both reality and our knowledge of it are interwoven with complex, active human relationships that cannot be fully determined (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 658). Intersubjectivism makes this focus explicit in order to capture moments of reflexive copresence, wherein the shaping of identities and shared understandings of reality occurs *between* human beings – including the researcher – in everyday interaction (Ricoeur, 1992). Thus, from an intersubjectivist position, this dissertation entailed working reflexively with church planters from within local conversations to explore how they continually interpret, understand, and relate to work and other people (Cunliffe, 2011).

Intersubjectivism understands reality to be socially constructed, contextualized in human interactions within and across social sites, and contested through human creativity and improvisation in communication (Cunliffe, 2011). In this sense, the world itself is a phenomenon of social construction, and intersubjectivism can be thought of as a way of being in the world, where people are “reflexively embedded” sense-makers (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 657). From this position, we can think of people as partially

exercising agency by choosing from macro-level *discourses*, or enduring and relevant systems of thought and sociocultural meaning, to assemble social realities and enact relationally responsive identity narratives that are also partially acted upon and shaped by discourses (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Foucault, 1981; Taylor, 2005). In other words, following from Alvesson's (2010) description of the individual as *storyteller*, intersubjective narratives of the self and the world are simultaneously (a) derived from common participation in competing macrosocial discourses and (b) reflexively organized to (re)produce a sense of relational continuity between people.

Thus, discourses such as religion and enterprise can be viewed as contextual – that is, constructed in local narratives and open to human influence – yet they are also experienced and enacted with a degree of stability and commonality through social routines like work that (re)produce shared meanings (Cunliffe, 2011). Ultimately, the focus of intersubjective ontology is on reality as a relational experience, and the world as built upon sets of reflexively understood organizing discourses (Kuhn, 2006a). The goal of intersubjective research, then, is to gather “commonsense knowledge” of participant worlds through methods that promote reflexive engagement with local cultures and social practices, such as participant observation, shadowing, and interviews – each of which are featured in this dissertation (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 657).

Importantly, an intersubjective position views epistemology as inseparable from ontology; that is, we come to know the world *in-situ* as we construct it in micro-level interactions using macro-level “raw discursive material” made available through

exposure and sensitivity to multiple competing messages and life experiences (Alvesson, 2010). From this perspective, knowledge is non-replicable and simultaneously retrospective, contemporary, and prospective, because it is both situated and constructed in the broad sharing of discursive meanings (Cunliffe, 2011). Knowledge of the world, then, can be thought of as an intersubjective outcome of talk; as Deetz (1982) put it, *talk is epistemic* – it is both *what* we know about the world and the self, and *how* we come to know what we know. This position is again distinct from subjectivism in its admission that researchers and participants play a role in constructing the narrative of the other, because research is also conducted in-situ (Ricoeur, 1992). Thus, intersubjectivism foregrounds a reflexive hermeneutic, where both researcher and participant own implicit knowledge that must be worked out together in reflexive conversations and interactions to construct what Cunliffe (2011) refers to as “a way of moving on” – that is, a path toward the continued sharing of knowing to make the navigation of emerging realities achievable (p. 665).

Research approach and commitments. Because there can be many philosophies of research design that represent outgrowths of intersubjectivism, it is important to specifically highlight the *relationally responsive social constructionist* approach I am committed to and in which this project is grounded (see Cunliffe, 2011, p. 658). Two fundamental tenets of this research approach are (a) that people experience and interpret the world both within the stories they tell about themselves and in their relationships with others, and (b) that discursive meaning is struggled for and constructed through interactions between people (Cunliffe, 2011). Based on these tenets,

the goal of research from this approach can be thought of as situated and sometimes critical insights that emerge through relationality, which is observed in meaningful dialogue between participants and experienced through conversations between participants and the researcher (Cunliffe, 2011). Thus, in the church planter work experiences and identity narratives accounted for in my analysis chapters, I intentionally include a range of church planter perspectives, stories, feelings, and reactions, and to some extent, acknowledge my involvement in the contextual negotiation of these realities and meanings.

Based on this approach, my research design facilitated an investigation of how church planters explore and employ various ways of thinking, including religion and notions of enterprise, in everyday communication and organizing actions (Allen, 2005; Orr, 1978). In this, I view communication as the essential activity that human beings engage in to make sense of their world on a daily basis (Allen, 2005; Ashcraft, 2007). Thus, we can think of communication as symbolic advocacy with material effect; that is, mutual realities emerge as we advocate for the primacy of certain ways of thinking over others by using their associated vocabularies during talk and interaction (Orr, 1978). By engaging with the lived communicative experiences of church planters through relational and situated methods, including forms of observation and interviews, I was able to gather deeper insights about the ways they think about the world in order to narrate a coherent sense of work realities and occupational identities (Allen, 2005).

Ultimately, a relationally responsive social constructionist approach to research pushes the researcher toward immersion in what Boje (2006) terms the *rivalry of*

discourse – that is, toward investigating realities and identities as multi-storied, relational expressions. This kind of knowing necessitates “something deeper than counting”; indeed, understanding the construction and (re)shaping of experiences and identities requires qualitatively relating situated, emergent stories to larger social systems of knowledge (Boje, 2006, p. 28). Specifically, I operationalized this through ethnographic inquiry that allowed me to see tensions in the discourses of occupation negotiated by church planters; however, this approach also demands that I turn reflexively toward myself and recognize my co-presence with church planters and the tensions created therein. Thus, I approach ethnographic work as less a function of gathering data about participants and more an interpretive process of discovering insights about a self-and-other relationship (Ricoeur, 1992; Taylor & Trujillo, 2001; Vidich & Lyman, 1994). In the following section, I detail the reflexive commitments that I applied to this project.

Ethical standards and reflexivity in ethnographic research. Before giving my own account for what it was like to conduct this dissertation, I first discuss how I define and commit to *reflexivity*. I view reflexivity as a research imperative (Creswell, 2007), following Tracy’s (2013) description of reflexivity as an ethic predicated upon “careful consideration of the ways in which researchers’ past experiences, points of view, and roles impact these same researchers’ interactions with and interpretations of the research scene” (p. 2). Thus, reflexive research practice begins by recognizing the subjective biases and power positions that researchers carry into the field, and proceeds by treating participants as influential co-creators of knowledge (Creswell, 2007). In this way,

reflexivity reveals that researchers are not static or hidden features of reality during fieldwork; instead, we intrude into and restory the lifeworlds of participants, reproduce power structures, and shift researcher and participant identities (Eastland, 2001).

At a broad level, reflexivity means “a turning back on oneself”, or the assumption of a self-referencing posture regarding how researchers doing research affects participants and outcomes (Davies, 2007). According to Davies (2007), issues of reflexivity are pronounced for ethnographers, as they experience an intimate and complex sense of closeness with the society and culture of other persons. Indeed, ethnographers cannot research something from which we are completely isolated (Davies, 2007). Thus, reflexivity in ethnography requires the ethnographer to turn back on their *ethnographic self* – that is, their identity as both research actor and spectator, which is an integral part of making sense of moments in the field before, during, and after they occur (Cunliffe, 2011).

With reflexivity in focus, attempting to craft “authentic” stories about participants should also be a key ethical consideration for ethnographers, because “language can never contain a whole person, so every act of writing a person’s life is inevitably a violation” (Josselson, 1996, p. 62; La Pastina, 2006). Moreover, intersubjective ethnographic accounts must be recognized as inherently ephemeral because they are primarily shaped by in-situ understandings (Cunliffe, 2011). However, even though our accounts about participant worlds will always fall short of completeness, ethnographers should remain committed to giving voice to participant experiences in as much fullness as possible through the relational and shared

construction of stories from the field (Clark & Sharf, 2007). Ironically, the ethical tensions many ethnographers experience when trying to account for participant lifeworlds can partially be attributed to the fluidity of intersubjective relationships encountered in the field that make participant knowledge available to us. One way of coping with these tensions is to reflect on fieldwork choices, such that the role researchers play in the narrative of participant experiences becomes more readily apparent (Ellis, 2007). Along with reflecting on my fieldwork choices, I spend time discussing my ethnographic self and the sense of relational connectedness I felt with participants in a subsequent section of this chapter (Ellis, 2007; Lincoln, 1995; Slattey & Rapp, 2003).

Finally, according to Bell (1999), the crucial point for recognizing the importance of reflexivity in ethnographic research is the interdependent and embedded nature of ethnographic insights. To make sense of field experiences, the ethnographer must move from distanced and detached critical observer toward emotional engagement with participants (Bell, 1999; Conquergood, 1991; Cunliffe, 2011; Eastland, 2001; La Pastina, 2006). In essence, ethnographers learn about themselves by learning about others, and vice versa, as relational actors within webs of situated, interdependent, and emotional knowledge (Eastland, 2001; Goodall, 1990; Ricoeur, 1992). With interdependence in mind, this dissertation can be thought of as a set of co-constructed representations of social constructions and embedded intersubjective experiences; thus, I call attention to the “constructedness” of my analysis and the representations therein (Kauffman, 1992, p. 199; see also Bell, 1999). Indeed, the ethnographic writings that

comprise my analysis are not value-free descriptions of church planters; instead, they are narrations of emerging knowledge about the world and others upon which my own commitments, described heretofore in this chapter, are imposed (Conquergood, 1991). Thus, I put reflexivity further into practice by attempting to incorporate a plurality of voices into my analytical accounts, and by discussing how choices and assumptions made during fieldwork influenced my discovery of interpretive insights (Scarduzio, Giannini, & Geist-Martin, 2011). I begin to take up reflexive practice in the next section as I explain how my personal religious history and current relationships with church planters shaped this project, as well as what it was like to do ethnographic research at church plants as a Christian-identified person.

“Turning Back” on Myself: Reflexivity, Identity, and Friendship in the Field

Ethnographers can practice reflexivity by thinking and writing about their own identities, lived experiences, and intersections with the lives of people they study (La Pastina, 2006). Accordingly, to position this project as reflexive, I turn my gaze in this section upon my personal experiences as a person of faith studying people of faith. I first recognize how this dissertation was initially informed by my personal experience with Christian churches, including established churches within various denominations and evangelical church plants. Secondly, this project represents an extension of early informal discussions I had with a church planter in the Bryan/College Station, Texas area. Herein, I briefly describe my history with Christian churches; discuss the influence my preexisting friendships with church planters had on this dissertation; and reflect on

my researcher identity, including what it was like to be at the church plants in this study and what issues came up for me as a Christian doing ethnographic work “at church”.

My church history and early conversations. Attendance at a Christian place of worship has been a weekly regularity for me throughout my life. Born into a religious family in the Bible Belt of America, I was a member of a denomination with Protestant roots well into my undergraduate years, during which I attended a private Christian university affiliated with my denomination. In 2009, I left the denomination I had been a member of for twenty-two years and began attending a contemporary nondenominational and unaffiliated church. In the early months of 2013, I met an evangelical pastor named Braden¹ who intended to start an evangelical Christian church plant called Ephesus Church² in the Bryan/College Station, Texas area. Through a series of conversations, this pastor and I discerned that we had overlapping religious histories and networks; as we began to interact in both social and religious settings, we became friends. Prior to the formation of the idea for this study, I also developed an interest in attending Braden’s church plant. I became an official member of Ephesus Church in March of 2014. Thus, the church planter who I shadowed for this research project is both my friend and someone I consider to be a spiritual leader.

It is important to point out at this juncture that my ability to perform identities that Braden also identified with was central to establishing my ability to do this research project. From a more critical perspective, much of my early relationship with Braden

¹ Braden and all other church plant worker names are pseudonyms.

² Ephesus Church and all other church plant names are pseudonyms.

hinged on our co-alignment with identity norms that made us comfortable with each other, such as our status as relatively young, white, heterosexual, Christian men from Texas. At a deeper level, though, my friendship with Braden developed because of the social ties we built by performing identity norms in unspoken ways; for example, we sometimes co-performed masculinity by watching football games together before the project began. Because I think of Braden as a friend, and because his personal connections to other church planters shaped the data set for this dissertation, it is likely that the identities I performed with Braden shaped his expectations of me in the field, and the expectations of other church planters that he connected me with. This sometimes made it difficult for me to gather meaningful data about his working life; for example, during one shadowing session in which Braden and I went to get a soda at Sonic, he spent the entire session talking about his favorite football players – a field research outcome that I attribute to the preexisting relationship I developed with Braden.

Importantly, though, other early informal conversations with Braden and initial observations of his work shaped this dissertation by suggesting that church planters interact with notions of enterprise, religion, and work in complex ways. For example, before the project began, Braden once described to me the difficulties of not having a dedicated physical workspace; at that time, he conducted his daily work at a local coffee shop. After noticing that the coffee shop removed a sign he pinned on their community board advertising his church plant, Braden expressed frustration that the coffee shop had not respected the sense of occupational ownership he felt he had developed at the shop by doing his work there. What I found interesting about this interaction was the

discursive connections Braden was making between work and the enterprising notion of “ownership” – as well as how forthrightly Braden spoke to me about emotional occupational tensions he experienced as he worked. Among others, this informal conversation shaped my belief that studying church planters as they work would result in a fruitful investigation of enterprise discourse as it intersects with contemporary religious practice.

In the spring of 2015, Braden agreed to act as an informant capable of providing me with access to his personal network. To that end, he helped me identify a set of church planters and sites for interviews and observation. As I soon discovered, church planters may be individually affiliated with a variety of parent churches or networks and work in diverse locations across the country, but many of them remain in close contact with each other. For the project at hand, I engaged with four church plant staffs, three of which (Ephesus Church, Philadelphia Church, and Sardis Church) feature Lead Pastors who were members of the same cohort during their training to become church planters with Fellowship Associates, an evangelical church planter development organization based in Little Rock, Arkansas. I learned of the fourth church plant (Smyrna Church) through Braden due to its geographic proximity with Ephesus Church, where Braden works. I address research participants and sites later in this chapter. In the following section, I consider in more detail how my friendship with Braden influenced this project, and how participant friendships can become a useful and problematic part of a relational research ethic.

Reflexivity and participant friendship in ethnographic practice. As I previously alluded to, one facet of this dissertation that variously represented an advantage and a challenge to my ethnographic research design is the friendship I developed with Braden. Participant friendship has been described as an intersubjective part of ethnographic methods that demands a more attentive approach to reflexivity (Ellis, 2007; Tillmann-Healy, 2001). According to Ellis (2007), participant friendships are potentially problematic – not in their existence, but in their performance. Indeed, performing friendships with participants further fragments the ethnographic self, as the researcher must construct and occupy a dual friend/researcher identity while often being unable to live up to the obligations of both (Ellis, 2007). Thus, scholars suggest that rather than denying the influence of participant friendships, ethnographers should allow the roles of researcher and friend to weave together and texturize each other in practice and writing (Ellis, 2007; Tillmann-Healy, 2001). That said, friendship as ethnographic method does carry risks for researchers and participants by requiring a willingness to accept and live with the scrutiny of a friend (Ellis, 2007). Indeed, the progressive overlap of relationships and identities between friends makes the negotiation of loyalty and betrayal between researcher and participant more difficult (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). On one hand, friendship can enhance the analytical sensemaking and interpretations of the researcher by providing advanced knowledge of the language and practices of an organizational culture (Bell, 1999); and on the other hand, strong assumptions about identity similarities between friends can leave important things unsaid that might be fully explicated with an outsider (Bell, 1999; Paechter, 2012).

Personally, I experienced significant feelings of researcher identity fragmentation when doing this dissertation project – not just because of friction between my researcher identity and my friendship identity with Braden, but also because of my congregant identity. What I mean by this is that as I conducted this research, I felt pressure to constantly perform multiple selves by participating in researcher fieldwork tasks, participating in my friendship with Braden, and participating in the congregational life of Ephesus Church. Moreover, beyond Ephesus Church, I found that gaining access to other church plants through Braden primed my relationships with workers there, such that they expected me to be who they imagined “Braden’s friend” to be (that is, someone who possesses the implicit knowledge of church plant life) rather than expecting me to be my “researcher self”. Thus, while I enjoyed the various aspects of this dissertation project that felt adventurous, such as traveling and discovering new locations in unfamiliar cities, I also felt emotional *and spiritual* conflict across my interactions with sites and participants. Because my participant connections were mediated in large part by a friend who is also a pastor at the church I attend, I found that participants often expected me to perform my spirituality in ways that matched who they thought *Braden* was, but not necessarily who I was in that moment. This was *spiritually exhausting* at times; for example, participants at Smyrna Church surprised me during one observation session by asking me to sit in the middle of a circle of people so they could “pray over me”. Though I did not want them to do this (and, after I left the circle, I wrote in my fieldnotes, “that was weird”), I obliged them, not only to avoid confrontation in that moment, but also to confirm my friendship with Braden in order to maintain site access.

According to Taylor (2011), participant friendships can result in additional problematic expectations of sympathy in representation and analysis. Moreover, community members may view researchers with whom they share friendships as internally accountable to the community (Humphrey, 2007; Paechter, 2012). And, problematically, the closeness and intimacy of ethnographic methods often makes the researcher perceive that they have fully experienced the life of participants, a feeling that may be compounded by overlapping identifications of friendship (Gill, Barbour, & Dean, 2014). Indeed, one problem that I faced was an internal struggle with the idea that by critiquing church planters, I was not only critiquing the church, but also my religious beliefs (and myself, for that matter). One way that I responded to this struggle was to add a column in my fieldnotes with “Agree/Disagree?” at the top; as I made notes about participant comments or interactions – especially those that invoked certain views of religion and spirituality – I would write down my immediate agreement or disagreement with the participant. Though my analysis is not predicated upon how I felt about participant faith beliefs, this reflexive practice allowed me to visualize assumed similarities and distinctions between my voice and those of my participants, and served as an opportunity to anticipate what church planters might hold me accountable for in my writing.

While I was in the field, I also operationalized reflexivity through forms of member checking and research disclosure. Formal *member checking* involves “taking findings back to the field and determining whether the participants recognize them as true or accurate” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 279). While I did not conduct formal

member checks, I provided participants with a member checking opportunity by sharing interview transcripts with them via email, and asking them to respond with any additional reflections, agreements, or disagreements, and to highlight important insights that I may have missed. While I received a few gracious “thank you” replies, none of the participants took the opportunity to respond with additional commentary or reflections. I also engaged in informal checking with participants during participant observation and shadowing by asking if things I noticed “rang true” for participants as well, and during interviews by bringing up insights other church planters had previously mentioned. In the future, I also plan to present an executive summary of my “finished” findings to church planters so that they may use my research for their own benefit, as well as the benefit of their organizations and communities.

Secondly, *researcher disclosure* involves not just the revelation of my personal assumptions and their effect on the project, but also periodically revealing myself as an embedded figure in stories that occur during fieldwork experiences (Cunliffe, 2003). Indeed, because the accomplishment of ethnographic fieldwork is an embedded experience, researcher disclosure involves anticipating and accounting for how our bodily presence in the field influences how participants respond to events and contexts (Bell, 1999). Thus, alongside my observations of study participants, I took notes about what I said and did in the field. Another way that I made sense of my embeddedness is by writing my emotional reactions to fieldwork into my fieldnotes, including how I coped with emotional stress by making choices about bodily representation in a fieldwork context marked by personal friendships (Gill et al., 2014). For example, I

noted repeatedly in my fieldnotes about the dress choices I made to feel comfortable in the field; rather than dressing in clothing that would make me feel physically comfortable, I typically chose to wear clothing that I believed would help me “fit” the scene and feel emotionally comfortable by looking like a participant. In the following section, I detail how my ethnographic data collection choices played out in the field.

Data Collection

Following from Allen (2005), at a metatheoretical level, this study set out to explore the social construction of meanings through communication and social practice. In keeping with my intersubjectivist commitments, I adopted a research design that promoted an understanding of how research participants make sense of experiences and narratively construct identities *in-situ* (Cunliffe, 2011; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Accordingly, in order to generate situated insights about religious work and occupational identities, I privileged collaborative ethnographic methods that highlighted church planter voices as well as the local contexts where church planters experience the world (Allen, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Specifically, my methodological choices were inspired by the ethnographic approach to studying church organizations taken up by McNamee (2011). Facilitated by her existing relationship with a pastor, McNamee (2011) engaged in participant observation at church business and pastoral meetings, conducted interviews with pastors and staff members, and observed and participated in church social gatherings. Then, to texturize and complicate her ethnographic data, McNamee (2011) analyzed documents generated by the church and its affiliated organizations and networks. This dissertation models her approach to the study of religious organizational

identity because of the way it yields rich insights about contemporary forms of religious work.

An ethnographic design. Intersubjectivism embraces ethnography because it makes room for meanings as they emerge in situated interaction, as well as the presence of macro-social organizing discourses within local identity narratives (Cunliffe, 2011; Eastland, 2001). Furthermore, an ethnographically inspired research design permitted me to collect multiple forms of narrative data and contextual information that made writing “thick descriptions” of church planter experiences possible – that is, descriptions that both explain human actions, including the contexts in which they occur, and explore the reasons why the ethnographer believes they observed certain things (La Pastina, 2010; Geertz, 1973). In this vein, this ethnographic study of church planters experiencing work as it occurs in a “net of fragmented, multiple contexts” helps us understand how contemporary religious organizing and identity takes shape in everyday life (Czarniawska, 2008, p. 4; see also Goffman, 1989; Pitts, 2012; Scarduzio et al., 2011).

Participants for the current study were individuals working at evangelical Christian church plants in four cities across the United States; I identify these research sites in more detail in the next section. Because of the growth of local churches in the U.S., visiting multiple church plants increased my ability to generate meaningful pragmatic insights about contemporary religious work and workers, and ensured the inclusion of participant voices that might otherwise go unheard. To answer my three interrelated research questions, I conducted an iterative analysis (Tracy, 2013) of ethnographic data that I collected via the following methods: observing and interviewing

church planters about their work; shadowing church planters in their day-to-day work activities; and analyzing textual resources produced by church planters about their work and organizations.

To ensure participant confidentiality, I provided all participants with a consent form explaining the emphasis of the project, their rights, and their role in the project. This form indicated that participation in the project was entirely voluntary and indicated consent to contribute data, and that participants could choose not to participate at any time without penalty. Between the creation of interview recordings and transcription, audio files were stored on my password-protected computer. In order to protect participant identities, I incorporated pseudonyms for both church planters and their respective church plants into transcriptions and all other documentation of project data. Currently, all data that includes identifying information about participants is under my curation and will remain there until the completion of this project, at which time all audio recordings and participant correspondence will be destroyed. In the following sections, I detail my two-phase approach to participant observation and shadowing, as well as my usage of semi-structured interviews and textual analysis.

Participant observation and shadowing in two phases. Immersion in the field through observation across sites of experience and organizing provides a multi-sensory way of understanding the circumstances of others (Conquergood, 1991; Cunliffe, 2011). In organizational ethnography, participant observation helps researchers engage in embedded relationships with participants as they invent occupational identities and make sense of their day-to-day work experiences (Czarniawska, 2008). From my

intersubjective position, I view participant observation as a conversational method that foregrounds researcher and participant co-presence, enables mutual self-disclosure, and enhances reflexive practice (Conquergood, 1991; Cunliffe, 2011). Thus, participant observation privileges communication as constitutive of ethnography; that is, the “doing” of ethnography takes place as we speak with and listen to participants (Conquergood, 1991). For this project, conversational methods, including participant observation, shadowing, and interviews, helped me respond to all three of my research questions by answering how church planters explain and perform religious work, how they construct ideal figurative practitioners, and how those practitioners intersect with church planter assumptions about normativity and difference.

In both participant observation and shadowing fieldwork, I adopted the performative ethnographic lens of *spect-acting* (Gill, 2011). Spect-acting specifically draws our attention to the entwined and reciprocal actor/spectator relationships at the core of shadowing, but it is also useful for helping ethnographers make space for more democratic research designs in general. According to Gill (2011), spect-acting hinges on an intersubjective “contract” between researcher and researched, where participants become co-research designers with the ethnographer (p. 129). Thus, to the degree they were comfortable, I asked church planters to play a role in research construction by guiding our conversations during ethnographic and formal interviews that occurred in the field, by having a say in what forms of observation and shadowing experiences occurred, and by co-reflecting on these experiences with me as they unfolded.

For Phase I of observation, I conducted approximately 41 total hours of participant observation across four different church plants sites: Ephesus Church in the Bryan/College Station, Texas area (10 hours); Smyrna Church in the Houston, Texas area (11 hours); Philadelphia Church in the Chicago, Illinois area (11 hours); and Sardis Church in the Nashville, Tennessee area (9 hours)³. Table 1 provides a snapshot of what these sites were like when I visited them, including the buildings each church plant meets in for both church services and staff meetings, as well as when these church plant activities begin each week. Each of these church plant sites was suitable for this study because they are active evangelical Christian church plants that meet regularly, and they shared common relational connections that increased the likelihood of gathering insights about church planter work that retained some degree of relevance across each site. Phase I observation sessions included participating in church services and other organized events at each church plant, as well as attending weekly staff meetings with church planters at each church plant. Each of these church plants holds official services on Sundays, as well as church plant staff meetings early in the workweek; thus, at each church plant site, my observation periods took place from Sunday to Wednesday, with specific observation times negotiated on a case-by-case basis with church planters at each site. All told, my Phase I participant observation sessions yielded 140 total pages of typed, single-spaced fieldnotes.

According to Gill et al. (2014), shadowing operates like a one-on-one ethnography, providing a window into everyday work interactions and organizing

³ All church plant names are pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant Observation of Church Plants

Church Plant	Location	Sunday Meeting Location/Info	Staff Meeting Location/Info	Approx. Hours Observed
Smyrna Church	Houston, TX area	Elementary school gym; approx. 60 members meet weekly at 10 AM	Scarlett's house; every Tuesday at 9:00 AM	11
Sardis Church	Nashville, TN area	Elementary school cafeteria; approx. 200 members meet weekly at 10 AM	Corporate office park; every Tuesday at 2:00 PM	9
Philadelphia Church	Chicago, IL area	Urban warehouse near train tracks; approx. 80 members meet weekly at 10 AM	Office space above bar; every Tuesday at 9:00 AM	11
Ephesus Church	Bryan/College Station, TX area	Strip mall storefront; approx. 300 members meet weekly at 5:00 & 7:15 PM	Corporate office park; every Monday at 9:30 AM	10

practices. Indeed, shadowing results in the formation of a “peculiar twosome” between the shadow and participant, in which the dynamics of emotion, cognition, and identity construction become complex and entwined for both individuals (Czarniawska, 2008, p. 10). Thus, shadowing can generate insights about work experiences that may not be accessible through formal interviews or observations (Gill et al., 2014). Moreover, the

co-presence of the shadow affords participants opportunities to explain their actions as they take them (Gill et al., 2014).

During Phase II of my ethnographic observation methods, I conducted 18 hours of shadowing with Braden, who is one of the Lead Pastors at Ephesus Church in the Bryan/College Station, Texas area. Shadowing involved being present with Braden as he conducted his day-to-day work activities at multiple local sites, including church buildings, offices, coffee shops, and other places he identified as a workspace. Shadowing took place over five consecutive days and began with a public church service on Sunday evening. Unlike Phase I, during which I only conducted observation at organized church meetings, Phase II entailed following and documenting Braden's individual work practices that included but also exceeded official meetings. Also, given the more intensive nature of shadowing, and the close proximity between me and Ephesus Church, I attended a broader range of shadowing sessions that helped Braden and me to better manage our experiences and emotions; for example, Braden mentioned feeling tired one day and asked to conduct a shorter shadowing session so he could rest before preaching a sermon. My shadowing sessions with Braden yielded 40 pages of typed, single-spaced fieldnotes. I completed both phases of observation consecutively over a three month period of time (July – September 2015), with the goal of progressively discovering the presence or absence of organizing discourses and their relationship to church planter work practices.

Perhaps the strongest advantage offered to ethnographers by participant observation and shadowing is *immediacy* with participants in the field; through these

methods, the ethnographer experiences closeness with both the lifeworld of participants and participant responses to their world (Goffman, 1989). In organization studies, shadowing in particular reveals the organization as a “messy” site of work and interaction, and helps researchers to highlight emerging organizing processes, blurred work/life boundaries, and the actual labor that people do (Gill, 2011, p. 11; see also Ashcraft, 2007; Barley & Kunda, 2001). The immediacy of shadowing also presents researchers with a significant challenge in the dynamic interplay between “backstaging” and “betrayal” (Ellis, 2007; Gill et al., 2014). In this interplay, participants afford the shadow a view behind the curtain of their lives, yet shadows expose the backstage in their writing and work. I made an effort to manage the dynamics of betrayal by continuously renegotiating access, making time for co-reflection, and providing space for dialogue with church planters about what stories might be told from participant observation and shadowing experiences (Gill et al., 2014).

My procedure for data collection when observing and shadowing was to attend church planter meetings and work sessions, and to take in-situ handwritten fieldnotes that represented key events, observations, and conversations as they occurred in the field (Van Maanen, 1988). I specifically looked for significant and repeated ways that church planter identities were framed, as well as the ways in which certain individuals reacted to conversations about church planter identities, and how church plant workers enacted certain identity frameworks that I recognized from my conversations with them. When possible, I also sketched the layout of each space in which I observed or shadowed church planters in order to diagram not just what was being said, but where it was said

and how meanings might be attached to those spaces. When detailed fieldnotes were not possible, I made “headnotes” and also “jotted” brief, concrete details that seemed to be key components of observed scenes or interactions into a lined spiral notebook (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Gill et al., 2014).

I created three columns on each page of my field notebook: the left for marking down time and location notes; the middle for recording what was being said or happening in the moment; and the right for marking down my personal agreements, disagreements, emotional reactions, and questions to aid my sensemaking processes later. As often as possible, I recorded my experiences at the end of each day of observation by typing out full fieldnotes, jottings, and headnotes to recreate vivid descriptions of people, environments, and dialogue (Emerson et al., 2011). However, to make room for my own humanity in this ethnographic project, I also periodically allowed myself to rest and type out fieldnotes the next day if I got tired or needed time to reflect on ideas that emerged during observation. After typing my notes, I would read back over them to create a list of emerging questions and engage in a rough preliminary coding process, making additional notes about themes, patterns, and performances in the right column.

When shadowing and conducting observations at Ephesus Church, where I am a member, I anticipated that I would take on what Tracy (2013) describes as the role of “complete participant”, wherein I could participate as a full member of the community while collecting data. I also anticipated balancing these observations by acting in other church plant environments as a “focused participant observer”, wherein I would enter the

field with an agenda for collecting data but without the emotional depth of complete participation (Tracy, 2013). However, I must admit that I was not in control of research sites or participants, and thus could not insist on assuming such “clean” researcher role distinctions, as participants across sites did not always position me as an involved participant. In reality, I found that participants at Ephesus Church began to emphasize their knowledge of my status as a researcher over my status as a church member; thus, despite my efforts to commit to a relational fieldwork ethic, I found that my interviews with the Ephesus Church staff sometimes took on an almost clinical tone. On the other hand, other participants positioned me more like a “complete participant”, even when I did not want to be; for example, when observing a luncheon after a Sunday church service at Sardis Church, Pete handed me a roll of paper towels and directed me to wipe off a lunch table (to which I wrote in my fieldnotes, “seriously, dude?”), as if I had the responsibilities of a member there because I identified as a member at another church plant. Ultimately, because I found myself constantly resisting the positions assigned to me by participants, I was unable to fully develop any sense of a concrete participant persona, which serves as a reflexive reminder that ethnographic fieldwork is relational in the sense that participants influence ethnographer identities, and vice versa. In the next section, I discuss my approach to gathering interview data for this project.

Formal interviews. Cunliffe (2011) describes intersubjective interviews as conversations in which researcher and participants jointly reflect on emerging issues and insights. Thus, for this dissertation project, interviews were useful for exploring the different meanings and interpretations church planters ascribed to their work and

identities. At a deeper level, interviews can also be seen as situated moments of identity construction (Kuhn, 2006). In this sense, interviews help me foreground the emergence of dominant discourses in church planter occupational identity construction, as well as how deviations from such discourses take place and shape church planter identity perceptions (Czarniawska, 2011). Moreover, being reflexive with interview practice necessitates a shift from viewing interviews as a *means* to produce data, to seeing interviews *as* data that are dependent on what participants have to say (Kauffman, 1992; Ezzy, 2010). For a study grounded in relationally responsive social constructionism such as this one, interviews can be thought of as “collaborative performances of evolving, politically inflected relationships between interviewers and interviewees” (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001, p. 173).

Thus, in addition to participant observation and shadowing, I conducted 18 formal, semi-structured interviews with church planters and church plant staff members in order to generate stories about their work and how they perform work roles. Table 2 provides a demographic breakdown of interview participants, including their church plant affiliations and the job titles they hold at their places of work. I conducted snowball sampling for these interviews by first asking Braden to identify initial participants; then, I asked initial participants to identify additional potential interviewees (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). All of the interview participants were also church plant workers who I observed in staff meetings and Sunday services. Each interview was approximately one hour in length, and interviewees were asked to suggest a preferred location for holding the interview; I made every effort to accommodate their location

preferences, which usually meant driving between church plant offices, coffee shops, or restaurants multiple times at each site. To help ensure an interview climate that was safe and comfortable for both participants and researcher, I approached choosing interview locations as part of openly negotiating the self-and-other relationship.

To make room for the participant as co-performer and co-constructor of meaning during interviews, I used an open-ended, semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix A) as a conversational catalyst (Cunliffe, 2011). Interviews initially centered on questions addressing the experience of becoming a church planter, the “typical” church planter workday, and participant thoughts about church planting compared to other types of religious and secular work. During interviews where the interview guide seemed to be unproductive or unhelpful, I asked process questions such as “What strikes you about this conversation?” to prompt participants to think through what she or he saw as important in that moment (Cunliffe, 2011). I crafted the interview schedule partly from my own knowledge of church plants and discourses of religious work, which was problematic in that it limited the directions in which church planters could take their stories of their own lives and occupational identities. To reflexively compensate for this effect, I encouraged each participant to direct our conversation in ways that they felt were most important, and to suggest generative topics for discussion if I was missing key insights.

Finally, with permission from each interviewee, I recorded interview conversations using a digital audio recording device. After the conclusion of each interview, I sent the audio recordings to a data analysis service for transcription and

Table 2

Demographics for Interview Participants

Church Plant	Pseudonym	Role (as stated or listed publicly)	Approx. Age	Married	Children
Smyrna Church					
	Craig	Lead Pastor	40	Y	Y
	Jenn	Prayer & Care Pastor	40	Y	N
	Scarlett	Kids Pastor	30	Y	Y
	Johnny	Worship Leader	20	N	N
Sardis Church					
	Pete	Lead Pastor	30	Y	Y
	Jack	Student & Young Adult Pastor	20	Y	N
	Teresa	Kids Director	20	Y	Y
	Saul	Worship Pastor	30	Y	N
Philadelphia Church					
	Gerry	Lead Pastor	30	Y	Y
	Terence	Worship Arts Director	20	N	N
	Tony	Systems Coordinator	20	Y	N
	Mark	Pastor	30	Y	Y
	Kason	Pastoral Resident	20	Y	N
	Owen	Pastoral Resident	20	N	N
Ephesus Church					
	Braden	Lead Pastor	30	Y	Y
	Tom	Lead Pastor	30	Y	Y
	Deb	Children's Ministry Director	20	N	N
	Sean	Local Mission Director	30	Y	Y

processing; this process yielded 295 typed, single-spaced pages of transcript data in total. After receiving each individual transcript, I read through them and supplemented

them with handwritten notes taken during the interview that contained other experiential information, including descriptions of the setting and nonverbal cues. Furthermore, I sent each participant a transcript of their interview via email and invited them to respond with follow-up comments and reactions, though the majority did not respond; and, as noted earlier, those who did typically replied with a simple “thank you” and closed the conversation. In the following section, I briefly consider how analysis of texts about church planters and their work supplemented this ethnographic project.

Textual analysis. To texturize and complicate my ethnographic insights about contemporary religious work and occupational identities, I also interrogated how various discourses, including religion, enterprise, and entrepreneur/ship were positioned in organization-level texts that describe church planting as religious work and the church planter as a religious worker. Toward this end, I conducted a content analysis of texts that align with and serve as resources in support of narratives about church planting and church planter identities (Cunliffe, 2011). Specifically, I analyzed relevant, publicly available texts that are endorsed by and describe the work of church planters, including the websites of church plants at which I conducted observation, shadowing, and interviews, as well as resources published online by church plant support networks (namely, Acts 29, Fellowship Associates, and Orchard Group). In total, I analyzed 197 webpages created by the four church plants involved in this study; 133 webpages created by the three aforementioned church planter networks; and 132 blog posts written by various church planter authors and posted to the Acts 29 website between August 8th, 2007 and January 21st, 2016, representing the entirety of the Acts 29 blog archive at the

time I ended data collection. I targeted these texts because they represent pieces of the story of church planter work, as well as actual products of church planter work.

Furthermore, I also asked church planters to identify textual resources that they felt were important or significant for generating key insights about their work experiences. One key book that church planters identified and that takes a central role in my data analysis is titled *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission* (Patrick, 2010). Written by a church planter and endorsed by Acts 29, this book is a popular theological text that is widely read among evangelical Christian church planters. Gathering and analyzing texts created by church planters about church planting supported this project in two key ways: first, textual analysis further contextualizes ethnographic insights regarding experiential intersections between religion, enterprise, and work; and secondly, textual analysis promotes reflexivity, because it is arguably easier to observe and be critical about documents and texts than situated experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

This combination of data collection methods yielded a series of reiterative and multi-level layers of data. Specifically, shadowing and interviews yielded micro-level data that informed the organization-level data produced by participant observations and organizational text analysis, and vice versa. Collecting and analyzing a multi-level data set is useful for tracing the movement of discourses across sites of interaction and levels of organizing (Tracy, 2013). For example, semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus on fruitful topics as they emerged from the viewpoint of the church planter; thus, participant understandings that emerged from interview sessions also informed my

ethnographic observations and shadowing experiences (Tracy, 2013). This interplay enhanced my contextual understanding of meanings that are important to church planters and facilitated deeper analyses of relevant texts that texturized and informed my interpretations of observation and interview data. Ultimately, the layers of data yielded by this research design resulted in an interactive set of “small but very densely textured facts” through which important insights about the experience of (religious) work emerged (Geertz, 1973, p. 28). In the next section, I describe my data analysis process.

Data Analysis

As the previous sections of this chapter identify, the “texts” (Deetz, 1982) that make up this dissertation data set include: fieldnotes on conversations, practices, and contexts taken during participant observation and shadowing with church planters and church plant staff members; interview notes and transcriptions; and relevant, publicly available church plant websites, church planter blogs, books, and other related documents. To help me draw insights across the breadth and depth of this large data set, I ordered the data chronologically and by type prior to analysis (e.g., chronological interviews with church plant staff members were collected together). According to Tracy (2013), this ordering technique is useful for illustrating analysis trajectories and drawing attention to how certain ideas become more or less important over the course of the project. Next, I analyzed this qualitative data set using a method inspired by Tracy’s (2013) *iterative analysis* process. An iterative approach pairs emergent readings and interpretations of qualitative data with a constant pursuit of reflexivity:

An iterative analysis alternates between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories. Rather than grounding the meanings solely in the emergent data, an iterative approach also encourages reflection upon the active interests, current literature, granted priorities, and various theories the researcher brings to the data. (Tracy, 2013, p. 184.)

Iterative analysis was appropriate for this project because it facilitated drawing conclusions from ethnographic data while acknowledging their intersections with the existing commitments and framework I brought into the field with me (Jackson, 1989). My iterative analysis process occurred in three phases. I began with a *data immersion phase*, which involved reading and reflecting on the breadth of the data three times, while informally recording moments of interest, intrigue, or mystery in a lined, spiral notebook. During this phase, I “submerged” into the entire data set in order to “listen” to church planter voices therein while reserving judgment and staying open to the possibility of multiple meanings for *church planter* as an occupational identity and set of work tasks (Tracy, 2013). During this phase, I also re-listened to interview audio recordings while reading over the transcription in order to check for errors. Moreover, I utilized qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA) to import interview transcripts and field notes as editable documents, and to digitally store coding categories generated by my analysis while I conducted the coding phases within the program. MAXQDA provided two key advantages for this analysis: first, it facilitated writing detailed analytic

memos during the coding phases; and secondly, it helped me develop an organized and coherent code system over time (Tracy, 2013).

Next, I took on a *primary-cycle coding phase*, during which I began to code the data and assign words or phrases to it that captured its essence in order to open up meanings. Following Tracy's (2013) pattern, I coded my fieldnotes from participant observation and shadowing first, focusing on details about *who*, *what*, and *where* as they emerged in church planter stories in the data; then, I coded interview transcripts and textual data, looking for additional active meanings and employing the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006) to compare and modify code definitions to accommodate emergent data. The outcome of this phase was 31 descriptive, first-level codes that revealed church planter activities, feelings, and work-related processes going on in the data. To make these codes more specific and active, I often included the local *in vivo* language of church planters as codes; examples of this include FEELING BURNED OUT or STRUGGLING TO FIND A RHYTHM, both of which were codes that incorporated the actual vocabularies of church planters as they described tensions they experienced at work. After coding a large portion of my fieldnotes and interview transcripts, I moved on to focusing activities, where I reworked my research questions to better represent themes emerging from the data and reviewed key literature to sharpen the direction of the analysis (Tracy, 2013).

I completed analysis after going through a *secondary-cycle coding phase*, wherein I critically analyzed first-level codes and synthesized them into 13 more cohesive categories of interpretive concepts, or second-level codes (Tracy, 2013). These

second-level codes, also sometimes called hierarchical or axial codes, serve as “conceptual bins” for the emergent claims of the project, and create what Tracy (2013) calls *prospective conjectures*, or new theoretical relationships, patterns, or positions. For example, I combined the first-level codes FEELING BURNED OUT and STRUGGLING TO FIND A RHYTHM into the second-level code HARD WORK, which both emphasizes the feelings of occupational difficulty being expressed by church planters and links these codes to stories in other research about entrepreneurs being described as hard workers (Gill, 2014). Then, I transferred these 13 second-level codes into a spreadsheet where I placed them next to data exemplars and added short analytic memos that identified other possible conceptual linkages (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, I used this spreadsheet to construct a loose analysis outline and craft my three analysis chapters by interweaving the data with disciplinary concepts from the literature review. During this process, I also set up a visual data display that can be found in Chapter Six.

It is important to note at the conclusion of this methodology chapter that the following three analysis chapters represent intentional choices on my part to present the data I collected as a more or less cohesive interpretive framework. I make this note about intentionality in representing the data to purposefully point out that my renderings of the data will be partial and designed to evoke major themes that I found to be significant, with a subsequent discussion of their relevance and implications in mind. Thus, I think of my analysis chapters through Luttrell’s (2003) metaphor of ethnographic writing as “curation”, where I openly recognize that my re-tellings of participant stories are mere

windows into a lifeworld that expands beyond this project in ways that cannot be fully contained on paper (Josselson, 1996). In Chapter Four, I present an analysis of the everyday work tasks that church planters accomplish to do their job, as well as the meanings they attach to those tasks; then, in Chapters Five and Six, I investigate how church planters construct, enact, and attempt to embody dueling “figurative practitioners”, each of whom has commitments to religion and entrepreneur/ship such that they actively resist the full accomplishment of each other, leaving the people who do church planter work in a discursive haze of incomplete occupational identities.

CHAPTER IV

KNOWING CHURCH PLANTING AS EVERYDAY WORK

The overarching aim of this project is to investigate the complex, dynamic, and sometimes-contradictory ways in which enterprise, religion, and discourses of difference intersect in the everyday expression and accomplishment of *church planter* as an occupational identity and line of work. This investigation is important because it helps develop a more dynamic view of contemporary religious organizing, occupations, and community engagement with churches in the United States, as well as a greater understanding of how notions of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship affect the experience of living and working in an enterprise culture, where adopting an “enterprising spirit” is problematically idealized as moral across personal and occupational spheres (du Gay, 1996; du Gay & Salaman, 1992). However, because *church planter* is a relatively unrecognized occupation, understanding how discursive intersections between enterprise, religion, and difference are meaningful for this occupation requires knowing and observing what church planters do as everyday workers, *and* listening to how they talk about what they do in order to lend meaning to their work. Thus, this chapter is designed to describe the actual labor being done by evangelical Christian church planters, and to analyze how church planter work is made meaningful in certain ways through the stories the people who do this work tell about church planting as a day-to-day job. Therefore, this chapter seeks to answer my first research question: How do

church planters and texts about church planter identities explain and perform church planting as everyday work?

Accordingly, I draw from Ashcraft's theorization of the glass slipper (2013) to frame this chapter as an exploration of religious occupational identity that considers the theoretical question: *what is church planter as a line of work?* Herein, I examine how church planters accomplish and talk about doing mundane work tasks in "ordinary" ways, and how simultaneously trying to accomplish religious ministry *at/as* work can complicate doing and talking about church planter work on a daily basis. By doing so, I use this chapter to "bring (religious) work back in", characterizing *church planter* as an "organizing archetype" that highlights contemporary (religious) organizing and shifts in work as a practical and communicative doing (Barley & Kunda, 2001).

Church Planter: Doing Mundane/Ministry Work

To create a (semi)coherent narrative about the seemingly inherent task features that distinguish *church planter* as a line of religious work, the majority of this chapter highlights observations of what church planters actually do in their day-to-day occupation, and how they talk about what they do to make sense of and give meaning to their work and identities (Ashcraft, 2013; 2007). The overall argument of this chapter is that church planters, as everyday jobholders, are involved in a complex and often confusing enmeshment of tasks that I henceforth refer to as *mundane/ministry work*. As my analysis will suggest, the word form "*mundane/ministry*" emphasizes that church planters do seemingly religious and "worldly" types of tasks in an apparently entangled fashion, often at the same time, and to the extent that accomplishing *mundane work*

appears to be a prerequisite for *and* an outcome of doing *ministry work*. Moreover, because church planters do not always experience or talk about doing mundane/ministry work as a simple combination of secular and spiritual tasks, they cannot be treated as separate types of church planter work. Additionally, to sharpen our understanding about what it means to do mundane/ministry work, I conclude the chapter by analyzing church planter stories about struggling to achieve a sense of balance and “rhythm”, both on the job and away from it.

As an adjective, *mundane* has two accepted basic definitions: first, “characterized by the practical, transitory, and ordinary”; and secondly, “relating to ordinary life on earth rather than to spiritual things” (“Mundane,” 2016). By both definitions, church planters do (and talk about doing) work tasks that are in many ways perfectly mundane. As Johnny explained, church planter work tasks involve “many business-minded things”, including writing emails, creating organizing systems, assessing projects, and spending time in offices working on computers. However, church planters must also simultaneously accomplish *ministry work*, which Saul called “the real work church planters want to do.” From my observations, ministry work can involve the preparation and production of congregational church services, preaching, spiritual counseling, praying with and for community members, and other tasks for which the desired outcome is spiritual or ritual interaction and the inculcation of religious beliefs rather than the growth of an organizational bottom-line. Practically speaking, doing *mundane/ministry work* on a daily basis seems to revolve around a unique and entwined set of functional, spiritual, and sense-making tasks that can be put into one of three

categories: 1) *meetings*, 2) *prayer*, and 3) *production*. Next, I discuss each of these practices in turn, including both my observations of church planters accomplishing related tasks, as well as the ways that church planters talk about doing these tasks.

Church Planters Go to Meetings

In both my observations of and conversations with church planters at work, meetings were ubiquitous and versatile church planter tasks that accomplished both *mundane* (that is, *not explicitly spiritual*) objectives such as staff development, goal-setting, and assessment, as well as *ministry* objectives, including establishing faith-based community relationships, congregational coalition-building, and spiritual counseling. To demonstrate the centrality of meetings to the mundane/ministry work of church planters, this section is organized around three major points: first, that meetings serve church planter ministry work by facilitating relational evangelism; secondly, that church planter staff meetings create secular tensions for religious church plant workers; and finally, that church planters lean on meetings as “knowable” and perhaps even bureaucratic labor forms to make sense of a job that seems to be loosely defined, even for the people who do this job.

Meetings accomplish relational ministry work. First, the centrality and value of meetings to church planter *ministry* work resides in church planter talk about church planting as a fundamentally relational religious occupation. Johnny described church planter work as “completely relational”, explaining that for his working life, *completely relational* means “I get to go to lunch with people. If they need prayers, if they just need someone to listen and understand – I can do that for a living because of the position that

I'm in." Similarly, Tony explained, "How this specific church believes work gets done is by building relationships. There's a thousand different administrative or organizational things we could do right now. But this church has said, we're going to do the relational stuff." Craig, who has spent his entire career as a pastor and the last two years as a church planter, echoed the sentiments of Johnny and Tony, describing church planter work as "very people-centered" before elaborating on the central role meetings play as tasks that accomplish *church planter* and identify it as an occupation marked by daily relational labor:

I'm having one-on-ones with people. I'm meeting with people in the congregation. I have enough time that I can fill it up with people time, which – at the end of the day, I'm in the people business. I have to be with people *all the time*. So, I'm constantly scheduling time with the people in the church to just be in their lives, and to really try to activate where they're gifted, where their passion is – and mostly to activate them in their daily time with Jesus. (Craig's emphasis added)

Craig's description of church planters as being "in the people business" highlights the importance of "one-on-one" ministry-oriented meetings for doing this job. Indeed, church planters experience and describe meetings as integral work tasks in their day-to-day accomplishment of church planter work. Sean added that thinking of the meeting as a mode of everyday work allows church planters to "reach out to new people" and to "pursue not just a family that we want to join the church, but the families that are in our church. We need to make sure they are healthy, they are taken care of, they are looked after." Thus, the evangelistic ministry work of the church planter occurs not just in, but also through doing the relational and emotional labor of being present in meetings with myriad community members.

Prioritizing meetings as relational ministry work also helps church planters make sense of what counts as church planter work, and what counts as an appropriate *outcome* of church planter work. As Jack, who joined a church planting team directly after finishing college, explains:

I think trying to just meet with people is kind of strange, but we try to meet with a certain amount of people each week. It can feel artificial. It's not like, if you hit that, you're being a perfect employee, but it gives you a goal. People are always on our brain. We're not trying to use people to get ministry done. We're trying to use ministry and all the stuff that we come up with to really teach people and really let Jesus change their lives through that. And so, it's a constant awareness that people are what we are about, not stuff.

Here, Jack acknowledges that accomplishing church planter work through meetings creates a central tension for church planters. On the one hand, “trying to just meet with people” generates uncertainty for church planters about whether it is the quantity or quality of meetings with community members that counts when assessing their ministry work. On the other hand, as a core feature of church planter work, meetings also provide “a constant awareness” to avoid materialistic accumulation as a measure of success.

Doing meetings as church planter work also helps define *where* church planter ministry work should be done on a daily basis. Jack described how a focus on doing ministry work through meetings creates spatial work tensions for church planters as they start their jobs each day:

We'll do some time doing some administrative stuff, emails, catching up on stuff from the weekend – things that you have to get done to make sure that the beast can function. And then we try to spend a lot of time outside of the church office. It's kind of hard to reach people when you're sitting in your church office for seven hours a day. We want to be at coffee shops, going to the popsicle shop, or whatever.

Jack characterizes doing “administrative stuff”, like sending emails – tasks that might be considered *mundane* – as necessary but ultimately monotonous and undesirable for church planters, specifically because these tasks require “sitting in your church office.” Doing *ministry* – “the real work church planters want to do” (Saul) – requires church planters to constantly relocate their meeting tasks *beyond* the “church office” and into community spaces like coffee shops. Jack’s comment about making sure “the beast can function” is also interesting because of how it characterizes the church planter’s relationship with the organization their work constructs. Like Craig’s earlier comment about church planters as being “in the people business”, this discourse presupposes an adversarial relationship between the planter and traditional organizing frameworks – as if “people business” cannot or should not be done like “regular work” or “administrative stuff”. As the rest of this section points out, this anti-bureaucratic narrative becomes ironic in light of other corporate meeting patterns adopted by church planters at work.

Staff meetings create mundane tensions. Secondly, I observed church plant staff members spending a great deal of time in offices or other spaces conducting mundane staff meetings. At each of the church plants I visited, the expressed desire for continual one-on-one meetings with community members to accomplish ministry work seemed to constitute more of an ideal than a practical work possibility. Indeed, unlike one-on-one ministry meetings, church planter staff meetings were described to me as “an official weekly meeting” (Braden) or “a scheduled meeting time” (Sean) for recapping the work of the previous week and looking ahead to future church plant events.

Not only do church planters spend a lot of work time in staff meetings – for example, Tony stated “I probably spend either one or two hours every morning meeting with the staff, checking in to see how the folks are doing” – but church planters also utilize a much different managerial vocabulary when characterizing staff meetings than the relational language they use to describe one-on-one ministry meetings. Owen created a mental picture of Philadelphia Church staff meetings as technical organizational maintenance sessions: “Every Tuesday we have staff meetings, with the lead pastor or, like, the systems guy just to check in and see what we’re doing, what projects we’re working on, and how to do it more efficiently.” The meaning shift from doing ministry-based one-on-one meetings with community members, to doing project-based, efficiency-oriented meetings with staff members was echoed by Jack, who describes Sardis Church staff meetings as necessary tasks for assessing church planter work:

We have a weekly staff meeting. *Everybody* has a staff meeting. There are lots of meetings in the world that make you want to punch yourself in the throat, but I don't think personally that's how ours are. Of course, not every meeting is a light bulb moment, but it's a good blend of encouragement and leadership development. So you're getting fed, and then you go through and crank it out: Here is what we are going to try to accomplish this week, and we're going to come back next week and – not be accountable in a “I'm ready to strike your wrist” way, but like – alright, how did we do, guys? What's working, what's not working? A very honest assessment of what we are trying to do, I think, is helpful for us. (Jack's emphasis added)

By emphatically claiming, “*everybody* has a staff meeting” and “not every meeting is a light bulb moment”, Jack draws our attention to his understanding of church planter staff meetings as helpful yet common and relatively mundane church planter task accomplishments. Indeed, I noted in my observations that attending a Sardis Church staff meeting was a rather ordinary experience. It involved sitting around a rectangular

wooden meeting table with eight members of the church planter team, one of whom was late due to getting a tattoo that day; Teresa was virtually present via Skype on a laptop. The other meeting attendees were casually dressed, wearing t-shirts, jeans, sneakers, and shorts. Pete began the meeting by shooting a foam basketball at a small hoop hanging from the door, and leading a prayer once he made a shot: “Thank you, Lord, for a chance to be faithful to what you’ve called us to. We pray that you would use this meeting in ways that would extend your kingdom.” After Pete finished this prayer, Jack gave a report about his ministry activities, after which the group brainstormed about new ways to use their Sunday meeting space, including having a meeting with church plant members and volunteers to discuss “the big picture of our vision” (Pete).

If I were to remove Pete’s prayer from my observation of this Sardis Church staff meeting, the scene might resemble common understandings and representations of such meetings in other corporate enterprises or commercial workplaces. Importantly, though, Pete’s prayer for God to “use this meeting” highlights how doing mundane/ministry work serves as a religious example of the ways in which the colloquial notion of the work/life boundary becomes increasingly blurred by contemporary forms of work. The language of Pete’s prayer was echoed in other prayers led during other church planter staff meetings, including one led by Tom, who prayed, “Lord, bless this meeting. Help us to be productive and efficient.” The content of these prayers, along with their delivery in “official” staff meeting task contexts, points to the complex enmeshment of faith and spirituality with being “business-minded” as church planters attempt to accomplish mundane/ministry tasks through various types of meetings.

Moreover, as a church planter work task that often resembles non-religious meeting work, church planter staff meetings can also become sites where enterprising discourses infiltrate, shape, and become entwined with discourses of religious work. For example, when I asked her to describe how church planters discuss the tasks they do on a daily basis with each other, Scarlett explained:

We were just talking about this in our staff meeting the other day. We are selling something. Our good happens to be Jesus. We're branding Jesus, and we're selling *him*. We just have a product that will actually help you. (Scarlett's emphasis added)

While future chapters of this project consider the entrepreneurial discourses at work here in more depth, for now, the way Scarlett makes sense of church planter work is important because of *how* and *where* her entrepreneurial sensemaking happens. Specifically, Scarlett mentions "talking about this in our staff meeting"; thus, church planter staff meetings can also be thought of as communicative work events and sites, where church planter talk constructs church planter work identities as ideally enterprising in their accomplishment of mundane/ministry tasks.

Finally, adopting a "business-minded" approach to understanding and doing church planter staff meetings as work can also create feelings of frustration for church planters. Kason, who works as part of a six-person church planting team at Philadelphia Church and plans to start his own church plant, explained how staff meetings might feel unhelpful for church planters when they too heavily emphasize assigning individual projects and conversational efficiency at the expense of team interaction and group processing:

I verbally process everything, but all these guys are working on their own stuff. So, to me, the meetings are good when I have an opportunity to process through things and we work on it as a team. But a lot of times, the meeting is more like – everyone gets assigned their stuff, and then we talk about personal stuff, and make sure everyone’s doing all right – and then we go and lock in on our computers again.

For Kason, Philadelphia Church staff meetings are “good” or valuable tasks when they represent opportunities for planters to spend time doing the emotional labor of making sense of their work together. And yet, these time-intensive opportunities are not always present in the accomplishment of church planter staff meetings as mundane work – especially, perhaps, as norms of productivity and efficiency are borrowed from enterprising work cultures, entwined with religious identities, and spiritualized in staff meeting prayers. In the next section, I consider how church planters point to meetings as knowable labor forms that structure their occupation in the face of labor uncertainty.

Meetings as (post)bureaucratic sensemaking work. Importantly, meetings also help church planters make sense of mundane/ministry work by acting as a sort of labor benchmark that grounds an occupation whose tasks are otherwise relatively ambiguous. Church planters in this study described a high level of ambiguity, instability, and unpredictability when trying to define their typical workday and accompanying daily tasks. As Johnny explained, “day to day, things are completely different” when doing church planter work; and, as Jack said, “typical is not really a good word for I feel like what we do.” However, church planters were able to recognize a modicum of typicality in their work according to the presence of a meeting or three on their calendar:

A typical workday is never really typical ... except for Monday. Monday is a full day of staff meetings, where we don’t take any lunches so that we can calibrate and pray and unify, and then start setting a game plan for the week. And then

typically, Tuesdays and Wednesdays are meeting heavy, whether it's training or lunches or coffees. (Tom)

In this interview moment, it was interesting to watch Tom, who is one of the lead pastors at Ephesus Church, express feeling like he has no typical workdays, only to think about it for a moment and change his answer to say that his most typical workday is “a full day of staff meetings.” Thus, as church planters try to communicatively respond to questions about what their line of work is, they do so by telling stories about meetings as mundane work that must occur for ministry to happen.

Other church planters expressed similar patterns of occupational sensemaking by leaning on meetings as stable, familiar, or perhaps more knowable tasks in the face of uncertainty about what constitutes accomplishing *church planter* as both day-to-day labor and an occupational identity. After initially answering my question about typical church planter workdays with “things are completely different”, Johnny immediately clarified that “half the week is meetings”, and that regular meeting tasks create a sense of “what we’re doing right, what we need to do differently, and the steps that we need to take.” Similarly, Craig responded by saying that “Mondays and Tuesdays are for meeting up with staff in two places”, while Tom explained that despite the lack of a typical church planter workday, “there’s a constant request for meetings. Some are really important and personal, and some are not. I feel like on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, there might be a rhythm of saying yes to lunches and coffees and interviews.” Tom’s explanation highlights both the uncertainty he faces when attempting to find an occupational “rhythm”, as well as the ways in which the meeting as a central and relational church planter task contributes to generating a rhythm of doing church planter

work. For example, Tom stories some meetings as “really important and personal”, while other meetings are not important. Thus, one key point of ambiguity for church planters is deciding how to assign value to a meeting, and deciding *who* gets to assign those values.

Although “church planters go to meetings” may seem like an unspectacular opening answer to the first question posed by this chapter (namely, “What is church planter as a line of work?”), it is important to consider the sensemaking power that such a seemingly mundane task might offer to a person attempting to accomplish a relatively unrecognized occupational identity. Indeed, church planters talked about meetings as core work features – not just of what they typically do, but also of what they *would like to typically do*:

I don’t know. It’s going to be all day-to-day. Typical workday – I’ll give you what I would *like* to be my typical week. Tuesday, it’s my long meeting day. Sometimes, I don’t even open up a text to try to look for a sermon. I know where I’m going mentally, but we have staff meetings at 8:00. After that, until noon, I’m meeting with the staff one-on-one, usually, unless I have another meeting. Throughout the afternoon, I meet with folks in the community. I try to do my “open door” type of hours, where people from our church, as well as people that just want to meet me – I get to meet with them. So Tuesday’s my long meeting day. On Wednesday, I do sporadic meetings, but that’s my study day. But it’s still a meeting day ... Monday, I do meetings too – all throughout the afternoon. (Gerry’s emphasis added)

For Gerry, whose title at Philadelphia Church is “Lead Pastor”, meetings are a central and desirable part of doing ideal church planter work – to the extent that the labor of meetings seems to take precedent over other more explicitly religious tasks, such as studying for and writing sermons. Braden, who co-leads Ephesus Church with Tom,

constructed a similar weekly pattern of tasks, wherein daily occupational ambiguity is sharpened and punctuated by myriad meetings:

Well, every day is different. So, Monday mornings we do staff meeting, and then Monday afternoon I just try to execute tasks. Tuesday morning ... I study until about noon, and then I usually have a lunch meeting. And then Tuesday afternoon is just different meetings with people, and in-between I am executing tasks – emails, whatever. Wednesday is a pretty heavy meeting day. And then Thursday morning I am back in study – from probably seven thirty to noon. And then same deal – just meetings and trying to calendar things. We get back together with our staff on Thursday afternoons, and talk through, are we ready for the weekend?

What we can take away from both Gerry and Braden is that while doing their job entails “executing tasks”, including apparently mundane tasks like writing emails and ministry-oriented tasks such as studying for sermons, these tasks are secondary to and occur in the temporal spaces not already filled with some type of meeting. Thus, church planter jobs seem to be organized around doing meetings as knowable or “typical” tasks – as if meetings represent something like occupational lighthouses, helping church planters make their way through the fog of doing a job that carries with it little day-to-day stability or task predictability.

The data in the preceding pages begins to answer the question, “what is *church planter* as a line of work?” by describing church planters as they attempt to accomplish and make sense of *mundane/ministry tasks* through myriad meetings, including one-on-one ministry meetings and official staff meetings. While a focus on meetings as tasks might enable conceptualizing church planting as a sort of religious service work, I believe the data demonstrates church planters doing and experiencing their work beyond “trafficking in interactions” (Barley & Kunda, 2001). As Johnny explained at the

beginning of this section, church planters understand their work as “completely relational.” In other words, unlike service work, church planter work does not explicitly involve exchanging interactions for money; instead, what makes church planter work difficult to define is that through accomplishing meetings as a central mode of work, what church planters offer for exchange is the relational exchange of the meeting itself.

This section also presents an interesting paradox for knowing church planting as work by raising questions about the extent to which church planting can be thought of as postbureaucratic labor. On one hand, church planters describe their work as meaningful when they are able to “do the relational stuff” (Tony) of ministry work by meeting with community members outside of traditional office spaces; on the other hand, they also invoke notions of traditional bureaucracy by structuring work around mundane staff meetings and talking about “branding Jesus” in those meetings. This contradiction surfaces tensions by questioning not only what counts as the “real work” (Saul) of church planting, but also *who* is constructed as allowed to do “real” ministry work – a question that I take on in depth in Chapters Five and Six of this project. In the next section of this chapter, I continue investigating what church planter work is by considering the role of prayer as a church planter task.

Church Planters Say Their Prayers at/as Work

In this section, I discuss prayer as a second mundane/ministry task that church planters take up and embody at and as work. For church planters, spending time doing prayer at/as work includes but also goes beyond spiritual or religious self-maintenance as a core feature of church planter work. As Tom explains, church planters understand

prayer as a supernatural yet practical organizing task that is accomplished alongside other tasks like meetings or writing emails, and even supersedes other tasks in importance:

I think prayer is the most important work we do. Including and inviting God to do all the things, and help us do all the things that we're trying to do – the most important work we do is how we pray. And not necessarily the volume, but the frequency that we're taking our initiatives and the stuff we're trying to do to the Lord is the most important work we do. I feel like *it is* the work. And I've said before in our prayer times that we could not do a single thing, we could not send another email or organize another gathering, we could just sit here and pray – and God is capable of doing all of those things. So for us to not invite him into those, and then let him invite us into the ways he wants us to participate in what he is doing wouldn't be a church plant. It would be a business launch. (Tom's emphasis added)

By suggesting that it is “not necessarily the volume, but the frequency” of taking up prayer as a work task that counts for church planters, Tom intimates that church planter work should constantly be organized by prayer. Sean echoed Tom's consideration of prayer as a superordinate church planter work task: “We have been really focused on prayer. So every time we are together, we just pray and that just leads it. And if we run out of time for anything, we still prayed.”

Tom's commentary also suggests that church planters prioritize prayer as a work task precisely because doing so creates a perceptual and spiritual boundary between doing church planter work and “a business launch”. However, the way Tom frames prayer also betrays and contradicts that boundary by highlighting the notion that the church plant might be understood as being like other “mundane” startup businesses. Braden describes a similar understanding of prayer as a distinctively essential church planter task:

The other day, we had a really, really sweet time of prayer ... we probably prayed for 45 minutes. And at the end of it, I was like, hey, listen. We've got a lot of stuff to cover today, and a lot of big decisions to make, and a lot of things to do, and our task lists are growing and they're about to grow even more, but what we just did is the most important thing that we'll do all day. We could literally adjourn the meeting right now, and we'd be good, because we're that dependent on God to move. More than we need logistics for Sunday or to think through Sunday, we need God to move. Even if we crossed every *t* and dotted every *i*, if he doesn't show up and do that, then it's not going to happen. It doesn't matter how well we can execute.

From Braden's perspective, prayer is a task that motivates God to "show up" and "move", an outcome that Braden characterizes as superseding the necessity of church planters completing other work tasks, including having meetings or Sunday church services.

However, despite this framing of prayer as an outward demonstration of dependence on God to complete work – as well as Tom's framing of God as not really needing the church planter to do church planter work, anyway (e.g., "God is capable of doing all of those things") – it is interesting to note that I never actually observed church planters adjourning meetings or stopping other work tasks after a prayer, as if God could literally take over and do their work for them as they suggested. Instead, I observed them praying together and then immediately taking on various mundane task lists. Rather than questioning the faith of church planters, this observation further highlights the tension church planters experience between their public organizing tasks and their personal spirituality.

Indeed, other church planters explained that even though they believed in the vital importance of prayer as a work task, they were not so sure that prayer was the only necessary task for church planters. For example, Johnny shared the well-known anecdote

of a person drowning who asks God for help, only to turn down three miraculous rescuers in boats and drown anyway, as an allegory for the relationship between prayer as work and the church planter's personal responsibility for other work tasks:

He's like, "God, I had all this faith in you. I thought you were going to save me." And God's like, "Well, I sent three boats for you." So, it would be dumb for us to sit around and say, "God, you're going to do everything, and we don't have to lift a finger. We don't have to do anything. We're just going to sit here and you're going to build this whole church, and there's going to be thousands of people and you're going to give us the land and the money to build the whole thing." It would be dumb to think that there's nothing that we can do as men on Earth with our own hands to usher in what God wants to happen. (Johnny)

Taken together, these comments from church planters indicate an understanding of prayer as spiritually essential but practically insufficient mundane/ministry work. In fact, Johnny's anecdote about the boat suggests that prayer should actually motivate church planters to be more agentic in their work, and to develop a greater awareness of the ways in which God might expect and enable other enterprising church planter work behaviors – such as acquiring land, money, or church members.

Visualizing prayer as an embodied religious work practice. Thinking about prayer as part of doing mundane/ministry work for church planters begs the question, what does doing prayer at/as work *actually look like* for church planters? Answering this question begins with considering how church planters come to understand prayer as a work task according to how and where prayer summons church planter bodies, both individually and in groups or teams. Gerry explained, "Every morning, the first thing I do is, I get up and pray. So, it's not necessarily cracking the Bible open, but I just have to pray every morning, and I pray throughout the day. I come to this room, and I try my hardest to just sit in this room and read." Similarly, Craig described doing prayer by

occupying a specific posture in a specific place:

I get up in the morning, and the first thing I do is sit in the chair of my living room and spend time with Jesus. To me that's the most important thing in my workday. I look at that as part of my workday because everything is going to rise and fall with that. If I choose to skip that, if I wake up late and get on Facebook or whatever, I know I'm not doing the number one thing that it takes for me to be successful.

Thus, understanding prayer as a work task contributes a sense of what successful church planter work is, when and where successful prayer happens (“in the morning” and “in the chair of my living room”), and what postures the church planter body should take on during successful prayer (specifically, to “*sit* in the chair of my living room”).

Talk about prayer also contributes a sense of how church planter bodies should be positioned on a “typical” church planter workday. For example, after I observed her church plant staff during a prayer meeting on a Monday morning, Scarlett explained, “That is a typical workday. To get to sit and worship in prayer for half a day – that’s awesome.” Similarly, Jenn, who spent many years working in commercial firms before joining the Smyrna Church planting team two years ago, talked about prayer as a task that helps her make sense of her uncertain work schedule:

Well, working in a church plant, I don’t know that you really have a typical workday. I have not experienced a typical workday, other than Monday morning and Tuesday morning, I know what I’m doing – I’m going to a church to be with other people in my organization. We pray together, worship together, and support each other, and talk about the business of church after we’ve prayed and worshipped. (Jenn’s emphasis added)

Prayer moderates Jenn’s lack of knowing a typical workday by helping her make sense of where she should physically be on a particular workday, who she should be there with, and finally, what they should do while they are there. Importantly, though Jenn

describes prayer as a task of first importance, prayer still does not eliminate her need to “talk about the business of church”; in this sense, prayer also seems to punctuate church planter workdays, such that church planters make sense of beginning business according to the ending of prayer.

Finally, church planters enact prayer as a task that entails and is known by various postures, including sitting, kneeling, reclining, and in some instances, lying down on the floor of a meeting space. After conducting observations of church planter prayer sessions, these postures seem to encompass a general sense of relaxation or remaining stationary during prayer, in contrast to the frenetic pace of constantly going to different places for meetings. Knowing how church planters associate prayer tasks with an embodied posture is important because it also reveals how church planters make sense of what various mundane/ministry tasks *should* look like. Specifically, I observed that when church planters transitioned from relaxed postures during prayer to doing other tasks, they would abruptly shift their bodily positions to match the task at hand, generating a sort of material rupturing that communicates colloquial notions of the so-called “public/private divide”. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes describes my observations of a Smyrna Church prayer session occurring in the living room of a staff member that suddenly shifted into a staff meeting:

Craig calls for a time of prayer. We are seated around a square glass table in Scarlett’s living room, facing each other. I am sitting on a white cloth couch with Jenn, while Craig, Scarlett, and Johnny sit on chairs. Johnny has an acoustic guitar and begins to strum. As I sit among them, they begin to pray and sing hymns, with a comfort level that suggests they have done this before. Craig, Scarlett, and Jenn get out Bibles to read. After nearly thirty minutes of this scene remaining the same, Craig speaks up quietly and suggests that they should ask God questions, like “what do you see when you look at me?” Then, he leads a

quiet prayer out loud. All of a sudden, upon saying “Amen”, Craig interrupts the prayer session by bringing up the church. His voice takes on a louder, more authoritative tone, and the meeting takes an abrupt turn from prayer and reflection to focusing on organizing practices and goals. Craig says he wants to talk about “where we’re headed in the next season. What’s hot? Coming into the fall, where are our gaps?”, and now it feels like being in a business meeting. The postures of the group change abruptly, too. Craig takes up a standing position in front of the table and the others turn to face him.

The stark and embodied shift from prayer to staff meeting recorded here creates a poignant picture of why church planters might struggle to know their work in “typical” ways. One reflection that can be drawn from these observations is how the prayer session itself is only constituted by communicative embodiment; in other words, rather than being a definite task object, prayer is known as work when church planters negotiate physical spaces together by positioning their bodies into prayerful postures – and also by subsequently taking up other postures that do *not* look “prayerful” in order to make prayer work distinct and knowable.

I also observed other church planters experiencing similar embodied “ruptures” when transitioning from prayer to other tasks. Braden, for example, led a prayer session before an Ephesus Church staff meeting while standing at a whiteboard with a red dry erase marker, writing down prayer topics suggested by other staff members seated around a conference table. In the margins of my fieldnotes about this session, I wrote, “If the room was put on mute for me, I’m not sure I’d know they were praying!” And, while observing the Smyrna Church staff preparing to begin services on a Sunday morning, I noticed striking verbal and nonverbal shifts between prayer and other tasks. On this Sunday morning, Craig and Jenn gathered the church plant staff together in the middle of the gymnasium in which Smyrna Church meets, and Craig made a request: “Let’s just

separate and pray over the room this morning.” At this, staff members began walking around the room separately, slowly crossing between rows of chairs, and touching each chair they passed while saying hushed prayers. After about ten minutes, Craig shouted, “Break!”, and the staff and volunteers began walking faster, speaking louder, and doing things like checking instruments, microphones, and slides. What was interesting about this scene is the way in which prayer as a task seems to moderate and, as Trethewey (1999) might say, “discipline” church planter bodies, such that their usage of their bodies communicates what prayer tasks *should be*, as well as the importance of doing prayer tasks to the accomplishment of their occupational selves. This is to say that for these church planters, meeting occupational identity expectations seems to include alignment with a certain image of how prayer fits as a part of doing mundane/ministry work.

What we can gather from the preceding data about prayer as a mundane/ministry task is that prayer helps church planters make sense of their everyday occupations and organizing as being supernaturally empowered and infused with religious meaning. Furthermore, when church planters pray, they seem to take up various embodied postures in order to *look like* they are praying. But, when church planters stop praying and start other tasks, like an official staff meeting, they seem to change postures to *look like* they are doing “business-like” work (Trethewey, 1999). Moreover, in the case of Braden and his prayer at the whiteboard in front of the conference table, we might also argue that church planters sometimes arrange their prayers to *look like* business-like tasks in order to give prayers enterprising meaning and organizing value. Thus, this section starts to surface some ways in which religion and spirituality may intersect with

church planter work tasks to generate dynamic and situated ways of knowing and doing contemporary (religious) work (Koschmann, 2013; Shenoy-Packer and Buzzanell, 2013).

Church Planters “Produce” Church Plants

Accomplishing *mundane/ministry* work also involves a set of church planter tasks that “produce” the church plant and its events. I use the term “production” here not necessarily to draw comparisons to the routinization of an assembly line, but rather to the creative nature of producing theater, art, and other performative work ventures. While both bureaucratic and creative work may involve tasks like creating a brand, establishing an Internet presence, coordinating production teams, and/or communicating with multiple audiences, we might distinguish creative or artistic work by saying that these tasks are done in the service of putting on a final production, such as a theatrical release. In the case of church planters, the “final production” is the weekly Sunday church service for each church plant. Juxtaposing *production* and *prayer* as church planter tasks brings into focus the ways in which church planters experience their work as a complex mix of mundane/ministry tasks – a combination that results in a lack of occupational clarity and competing occupational identity discourses. Moreover, thinking of church planter production tasks as performative and even theatrical in “both life and metaphor” helps to highlight work/life boundary issues experienced by church planters working in an enterprise culture (Boje, Luhman, & Cunliffe, 2003). This section considers four interrelated church planter production tasks in turn: branding, creating an online presence, coordinating volunteers, and putting on a Sunday “show”.

Branding the church. First, church planters and their staff members make a significant commitment to “mundane” branding and marketing tasks. These tasks are necessary in part because church planters often hold their Sunday services in untraditional, difficult to access, or even totally unknown locations. For example, I observed church plant services occurring in elementary school cafeterias (Sardis Church, in the Nashville, Tennessee area), in school gymnasiums (Smyrna Church, in the Houston, Texas area), in empty strip mall storefronts (Ephesus Church in the Bryan/College Station, Texas area), and in urban warehouses underneath train tracks (Philadelphia Church, in the Chicago, Illinois area). As Terence explained about Philadelphia Church, “We’re in an industrial area where we don’t have a sign or anything, so we don’t have any type of promotion throughout the week to bring people to the church.” In response to these constraints, church planter work involves branding and marketing communication tasks to increase community awareness of Sunday service events. Sometimes, this work evokes promotional work done for theater venues, such as handing out flyers and handbills in public to passers-by:

I feel like when we first started, me and the other guys, we spent literally our whole week doing marketing, passing out flyers – literally just downtown, handing them out to people as they passed by. That sucks. I hate those people. That’s the worst. (Kason)

Despite Kason expressing a sense of dissatisfaction with this task, he and other church plant workers remained committed to the need for Philadelphia Church to create, market, and establish a brand presence in their local community. During a shadowing session with Braden, I noticed he was carrying some promotional materials for Ephesus Church, including flyers similar to those Kason passed out in his community. All of the

promotional materials included a similar logo and color scheme; when I asked Braden to explain the purpose of creating a unique Ephesus Church logo, he responded by saying, “It speaks to who we are”, before elaborating that church planters have learned to be strategic with their branding tasks. For example, the Ephesus Church logo does not include any of the colors of a college that Ephesus Church shares a city with; if it did, Braden explains, “it’s going to be washed out because of the city you’re in.”

I recorded more of my interaction with Braden about his church plant brand and logo in my shadowing fieldnotes:

Braden says that when he designed the logo, he had to account for “what colors pop” and “what they say, what they mean.” I press in about designing the logo and the importance of choosing certain colors, and Braden says: “I really like green. There’s not a lot of green. Green speaks to growth, and our city is growing. The red center is a hint of the gospel. And the lower case lettering speaks to youthfulness.” He sips his coffee, and suddenly his eyes get bright, like he has an unexpected idea; he smiles, holds up a silent “hold on a sec” finger, and leans over to get his laptop out of his backpack. He sets the laptop on the coffee shop table and turns it so I’m facing the screen. He shows me five or six different rejected logo designs, critiquing each one and explaining why he rejected it. It’s almost like I’m listening to a design firm rep make a pitch after doing brand design work. Then Braden says, with urgency – like he’s trying to convince me of the gravity of the situation: “You *have to* rebrand this stuff every so often.”

As a production task, Braden’s creation of the Ephesus Church logo involved more than making identity claims; part of the work was picking colors that “pop” – that is, colors that stand out in a crowd of other local organizations to carve a space for the church plant to perform in the conscience of community members. And, for Braden to emphasize and even be excited by “rebranding” as a *necessary* church planter task suggests that producing a church plant brand is a continuously active part of doing mundane/ministry work.

Each of the church plants I visited created their own visibly unique logo and color scheme, and church plant workers at each location also spent quite a bit of work time ensuring that their brand was present across multiple contexts, including Sunday services, and featured on artifacts like church plant websites, clothing, and other promotional materials. For example, the website for Smyrna Church prominently displays their unique, cross-shaped logo on every page. Stylized to look like a stained-glass window, the logo is also featured in photos of church plant members posted on Smyrna Church's website; it appears on Smyrna Church banners that are displayed during church plant events; and it is found on the front of Smyrna Church tee shirts, which I observed being worn by staff and volunteers at community service events, and even by a Smyrna Church member as he was being baptized! When I attended one of Smyrna Church's Sunday services, their logo and branding scheme was present everywhere:

Jenn is covering two long plastic folding tables with a black dropcloth. She sets an upper-body mannequin on the far left side of the table, and then fits it with a black tee shirt featuring the Smyrna Church logo. With the mannequin in place, she sets up several stackable wire bins next to it, filling them with baseball caps and more tee shirts, all with the Smyrna Church brand. Then, Jenn sets various promotional materials about Smyrna church at the front edge of the table, including information sheets, logo stickers, bookmarks with FAQs, and small drawstring bags with the Smyrna Church logo on them. Finally, she puts out prayer request cards and visitor information sheets on clipboards with Smyrna Church pens. I can't help but think that I just watched Jenn set up a Smyrna Church merch table.

In similar fashion, church planters at Sardis Church created a logo to establish a sense of place and strategically distribute the identity of their church. Sardis Church meets in an elementary school cafeteria that would be difficult to locate without the creation of large

signs and banners bearing the Sardis Church logo and brand color scheme that staff members and volunteers place outside the school on Sunday mornings, thereby transforming the elementary school into a church in order to help congregants make sense of the space as a church, rather than a school.

When I entered the elementary school cafeteria that serves as the Sardis Church meeting space, I observed the church plant staff and volunteers using the logo to produce a *place* for Sardis Church. For example, they set up two large vertical banners at the front of the room, each one featuring only the Sardis Church logo, and illuminated them with bright red spotlights, such that these banners were the most prominently visible features of the space. Sardis Church staff members and volunteers wore tee shirts featuring the Sardis Church logo, and offered me similarly branded gifts – including a coffee mug and a CD of music written, recorded, and produced by Sardis Church planters. Producing promotional materials featuring church plant branding schemes was also a prominent task accomplished during church planter staff meetings. During a meeting with the Sardis Church staff, Pete spent time discussing ways to strategically increase the amount of promotional items they were giving away; when one of the other staff members noticed a typo on an informational flipbook featuring the Sardis Church logo, Pete sarcastically exclaimed, “Oh, that’s great work!” Pete later explained to me that he was expressing frustration about the typo, because a typo on a Sardis Church promotional item might create the impression of poor quality work done by the church plant.

What is interesting about church planter brand creation is the way that these seemingly mundane (that is, secular) tasks are entwined with both the function and emotional performance of church planter ministry. From Braden's excitement over designing a logo with a "hint of the gospel" in the color scheme, to Craig and Jenn wearing Smyrna Church tee shirts bearing a cross logo, church planters imbue mundane marketing elements with religious meaning, such that wearing the church plant brand can be thought of as accomplishing the performance of ministry. In this sense, the theater becomes both an organizing metaphor for mundane/ministry work, as well as a reflection of the occupational lives church planters live when creating and deploying their brand (Boje et al., 2003).

Producing the church plant online. In addition to accomplishing mundane production tasks by creating ministry-related logos and branded spaces, church planters also consistently use the Internet and web applications to produce their churches and the way their members interface with the church on a daily basis. Importantly, the Internet represents a worksite for church planters where their mundane and ministry work intersects; as Tony explained, "we're using a bunch of tools and software here that was never designed with church intent, but it's applicable because we're in a stage of life that's applicable to where they were targeting it for companies." Similarly, Terence talked about how even though he had "printed out flyers and handbills to hand out to people in the community", he accomplished marketing for his church plant primarily by "using different social networks, such as Facebook, of course, and Instagram, and

Twitter – just to get the word out ... to let them know, “Hey, we’re here and you can come to this Sunday service.”

Creating a visible Facebook page was the most common social media production task I observed across each church plant. For example, each of the church plant webpages I analyzed for this project included direct links to connected Facebook pages featuring church plant logos and branding schemes. Furthermore, church planters actively used Facebook to complete work tasks during their workdays; at one Ephesus Church staff meeting, Braden and Deb created a Facebook event page to invite community members to an Ephesus Church-sponsored tailgate at a local football game. Similarly, at a Smyrna Church staff meeting, Craig expressed frustration about the lack of activity on the Smyrna Church Facebook page, saying in exasperation, “Come on. It’s 2015! If you don’t have Facebook ... it’s how people communicate!”

The object of Craig’s frustration is not insignificant, because it reveals the way church planters understand web applications as production tools for accomplishing mundane/ministry tasks. In this vein, I observed church planters spending significant amounts of work time writing and sending emails to communicate with community members, plan events, and coordinate volunteers. Kason explained that “clear communication of everything” is a crucial church planter task, because “you’ve got to clearly communicate with those who are supporting you ... just like a startup has to really clearly communicate with their investors.” Tom also clarified that writing emails is an important church planter work task, saying, “I try to spend time in the office,

responding to emails and communicating to folks.” Deb gave a more detailed account of how email fits into her workday:

I feel like my day is different every day, but typically, my days involve communicating with the church at large in some form or fashion, whether that is different groups of volunteer teams, or whether that is the church as a whole and reminding them of different events, planning those different events, or recruiting volunteers for different things ... Somebody has to be emailing the people, and organizing the people, and planning the events, and making things happen, and making sure things are where they’re supposed to be and people know what’s supposed to be going on.

What I find interesting about Deb’s description of her work is her claim that “somebody has to be emailing the people”, by whom she means the members of the congregation.

This narrative not only creates the notion that church plant members should be digitally connected, but also creates the expectation that all church plant workers should be technologically capable. Indeed, the emphasis on social media and email as primary methods of communication with constituents suggests that church planters have adopted technological work norms that may be seen as entrepreneurial (Gill, 2014); as Deb suggests, the organizing of the church plant is partially produced in online spaces, such that community members are expected to have access to those spaces in order to participate with the congregation. In the next section, I discuss volunteers as playing a key role in producing church plant performances.

Coordinating volunteer production teams. Along with creating a brand and establishing an online presence, church planters also described volunteer coordination as an important church planter production task that further performs and enmeshes mundane/ministry work. Kason said that doing his job required him to “talk with people in our church to get them to volunteer in different places and help schedule them”, and

Scarlett explained that she spends “several hours in the afternoon ... emailing volunteers and setting up schedules” for Sunday services and other community events sponsored by her church plant; furthermore, Scarlett clarified that putting this amount of work into volunteer coordination is important for church planters, because “staff-wise, there’s only a couple of paid positions in the church plant. The rest is all volunteer-based.” By pointing out that only a few church plant workers are paid for their work, Scarlett suggests that doing mundane/ministry work requires volunteers who are willing to do this work for its own sake; in other words, this suggests that church planters define the value and meaning of volunteers according to their level of disciplined commitment to uncompensated, belief-based labor.

Furthermore, the importance of volunteers for accomplishing mundane/ministry work creates a higher set of expectations for volunteer commitment to the church plant. During my observation at a Smyrna Church staff meeting, Craig and Scarlett spoke about trying to balance their desire to not over-use volunteers with their need for “high-energy, high-capacity people” to put into various volunteer roles, such as greeting people that enter the church site, helping people find parking places, and serving communion during church services. These discussions often took on highly economic language when evaluating potential volunteers; for example, when discussing how one person fit a volunteer role, Scarlett said, “I don’t know how much she will take ownership, but she’s willing to serve.” Additionally, Scarlett described another person as a “super volunteer” who was at risk of “burning out”; when Scarlett mentioned this, Craig asked, “Can you think of a replacement that we could pay?” What is interesting about this discourse is the

way that church planters talk about volunteers using enterprising language like “taking ownership”, “burning out”, and talk about “energy” and “capacity”. Here, church planters seem to suggest that coordinating volunteers means choosing volunteers who are willing to be entrepreneurial in their service to the church; and, this discourse generates clear class distinctions between volunteers, as those who are “high-energy” and “take ownership” are more likely to be valued as “super volunteers”. In other words, as church planters talk about coordinating volunteers in enterprising ways, they also levy entrepreneurial expectations upon volunteer work.

Scarlett’s desire to find “super volunteers” willing to “take ownership” of unpaid roles with the church plant was echoed at other church plants as well. During an Ephesus Church staff meeting, Braden used the same terminology, suggesting that he prefers it when “people step up” and “take ownership of their volunteer roles” so they can be “held accountable”. I also observed Craig asking for more volunteers after his sermon on a Sunday morning at Smyrna Church, as he told Scarlett he would do; however, Craig did not ask for volunteers, but rather for “partners” who would help set up chairs or provide childcare, saying, “I’m not asking you to give your life to the church, but to a great vision and mission.” Once again, evaluating volunteers through the enterprising discourses of ownership and partnership demonstrates the way that producing the church plant involves entrepreneurial expectations from church planters regarding how “good volunteers” should personally commit to also doing mundane/ministry tasks.

Importantly, volunteer identities are also discursively folded into the theatrical performance of church planter work. For example, Saul suggested at a Sardis Church

staff meeting that the church plant staff should “hold auditions” to screen new volunteers, and Teresa mentioned being unhappy with certain volunteers who were “tardy” on Sunday mornings; “after I threatened them”, she explained sarcastically, “they were all on time and it was so stress free.” Thus, like colloquial visions of stage performers making ends meet as they wait for their big break on Broadway, church plant volunteers are not only expected to commit to work that they may not be highly compensated for, but they are also expected to prove their worthiness to take ownership of mundane/ministry work, and then to reinforce their worthiness by showing up on time for the Sunday performance.

Putting on the Sunday show. Finally, as a part of doing the mundane/ministry work of church planters, production tasks also include the performance of weekly congregational church services. For the church planters in this study, these services take place on Sunday mornings or evenings, but production tasks in anticipation of these congregational gatherings are done throughout the week in various ways. As Craig explained, “Wednesdays, at least from nine to noon is sermon prep for me, to really make some headway on what’s going on that week. And then I just find time to finish on Thursdays, and a lot of times on Saturday nights to finish preparing for Sunday.” Scarlett clarified that “a typical Sunday would be the execution of all the work that we laid out from the week.” For some church plant workers, “all the work that we laid out from the week” can involve a significant amount of production tasks done with Sunday services in mind:

As the worship arts director, I oversee a lot of different areas ... I have to put the setlist together, so those are the songs that you hear. I have to bring a band

together. That's everybody that you see on Sunday out front ... The visuals that everyone sees, the graphics that you see, the lyrics that you see on screen are run through ProPresenter. I have to make sure ProPresenter gets together every Sunday ... Programs for the service, we have that, pass them out to my team ... Set up and tear down – I still oversee that and making sure we're setting up right, making sure we got all that stuff together, making sure I have someone there to run sound, making sure everything is just working well ... So, that's a lot of things. Day to day, I'm preparing for that. (Terence)

Terence's description of "running the worship department within this church plant" brings to mind a production manager for a theatrical production rather than a religious worker; and yet, this description of production tasks is how Terence understands fulfilling the role of "worship arts director" for a church plant. Thus, as Terence mentions, his "day to day" seems to fit within a particular framework of preparation for putting on a weekly show each Sunday. What is significant about this is the implication that church plant work involves preparation for an audience of *consumers* each week (du Gay, 1996); and, as church planters discursively cast congregational members in this role each week, they fundamentally shift the church away from being a place of civic participation and toward being another site of marketplace exchange.

Production tasks remain a central part of church planter work once Sunday arrives each week. During a shadowing session with Braden, I asked him to describe what Sundays look like as workdays for him, and he sketched out the following schedule on a napkin:

- 7:00 AM: Arrive at church offices, do some email, and then write sermon out on a whiteboard. Use this version to start final sermon note preparation.
- 10:30 AM: Head back home and spend time with family.
- 1:30 PM: Head up to the church to help with and oversee volunteers staging Ephesus Church materials. Set out chairs, band instruments, sound booth, box fans, information booth, green room for the band, moneyboxes.
- 3:00 PM: Go to the church or Starbucks to put final sermon notes together.

Run through and try to memorize them.

- 4:45 PM: Return to the church no later than this time to welcome people to their seats.
- 5:00 PM: First Ephesus Church service begins.
- 7:15 PM: Second Ephesus Church service begins.
- 9:00 PM: Finish packing up Ephesus Church materials and head home.

As the third bulleted point in this list shows, part of Braden's 14-hour Sunday production task list also includes "staging" the church plant space, a task that I observed multiple times across each of the church plants I visited for this study. As Terence described, the church plant staging process includes a significant amount of audio, visual, and spatial production. Doing these production tasks creates unique spatial tensions for church planters; for example, staging work at Smyrna Church involved backing up a large white audio and visual production trailer to the side of an elementary school. What the accomplishment of this task communicates is a sense of prioritizing a high-quality Sunday performance, such that a trailer full of production equipment is necessary to carry out the act of a Sunday church service.

Indeed, staging as a church planter production task often means church planters using production elements that might otherwise seem out of place to transform certain spaces into places of worship. For example, Philadelphia Church meets in the upper floor of an urban warehouse, accessed by an industrial elevator and featuring mismatching wood floors, visible A/C piping and electrical wiring, and open brick walls; Ephesus Church meets in an unfinished strip center storefront that has a corrugated metal ceiling, exposed wiring and ventilation, and aging gray industrial carpeting. But, in both of these places and elsewhere, church planters explained that they make use of certain "set pieces" (Saul) and technology when staging to produce a Sunday experience. From

my observations, these set pieces can include temporary stages washed in colored LED lights, expensive-looking digital HD screens that flash church logos, stools and podiums for preachers to sit on or stand behind, and enough instruments for a full band.

Interestingly, church planters explained that their American church plant context played a role in the staging tasks they take up each week. When I asked Braden if the material setup of the physical spaces his church plant meets in matters, he replied:

Yeah, it does. People struggle with not having or going to a building. They think, “I’m not going to a church that meets in a grocery store”. It’s a big deal for Americans. It’s a legitimacy thing. It helped us to be in a building that another church meets in.

When asked the same question, Pete said, “going to church at an elementary school can be weird”, and emphasized that “managing first impressions” to make sure visitors feel “comfortable as soon as possible” is an important church planter task on Sundays. For church planters, “managing first impressions” seems to include a mix of production-related tasks, including creating a branding scheme and staging church plant spaces in ways that resemble other familiar production settings like concerts, such that visitors may feel “comfortable” participating in church services in spaces that are not typically associated with religious organizing and ritual practice. Crucially, though, what the adoption of this material performance framework communicates is a shift in how we come to know what churches and “church work” should look like, what they mean for their communities, and how people should engage with them; indeed, if church planters view performance staging as “a legitimacy thing” that disguises the undesirability of the places in which they meet, this implies that going to a contemporary church plant service might be thought of as “going to a show” rather than searching for deeper spiritual

meaning – and, perhaps, that spiritual engagement has somehow been constructed as a *less* legitimate church planter work outcome than putting on a high-quality show.

Once staging the church is complete each Sunday, church plant staff members must deliver the performance of the Sunday service to their weekly congregational audience. At each of the church plant services I observed for this study, these performances included the pervasive use of technology, including high-tech computer equipment and digital projectors; instrumental worship music that follows popular music norms regarding instrumentation, such as electric guitars and drums; the use of particular lighting features, including colored spotlights, to draw attention to certain individuals or images on a stage; and a speaker who delivers a sermon using a face mic and engaging visual aids. What is intriguing about sermons as a part of church planter production work is that doing this task often *looked* a certain way: Pete, Braden, Craig, and Gerry all wore jeans, a button down shirt, and trendy leather shoes as they delivered sermons; each of them used an iPad or some other kind of technology to keep track of their notes on stage; and each of them wore a hands-free face microphone – creating the notion that preaching at a contemporary church plant is a production task akin to speaking at a TED talk conference. These material performance choices express the tensions of doing mundane/ministry work: though preaching is most commonly thought of as a ministry task, I observed church planters performing preaching by wearing a sort of mundane theatrical veneer through clothing and technology that might be more commonly associated with a high-tech conference or theater production than the church. In this, the

meaning of preaching itself seems to shift as the meaning of the person doing the preaching takes on a more mundane visage.

Church planters also spend time after Sunday services are over taking up post-production tasks, including taking down temporary stages, putting away music instruments, loading production trailers, stacking chairs, and other “maintenance kind of tasks”, such as “mixing and mastering the sermon podcast and uploading it to three different website locations” (Saul). Staging, preaching, and post-production tasks involve a degree of physical labor; for example, after I observed him preaching one Sunday, I also saw Craig crawling around on his hands and knees beneath a temporary stage, using a wrench to loosen bolts holding the stage panels together. As the beginning of this section noted, what focusing on the production tasks taken up by church planters accomplishes is a deeper understanding of the ways in which *church planter* is an occupational identity that is contested by the very tasks that it is supposed to achieve on a daily basis. In doing meetings, prayer, and production tasks to complete their *mundane/ministry work*, church planters are involved in work that is simultaneously spiritual and decidedly “worldly”. What this amalgamation of tasks creates is an occupation that is difficult to know or predict, both for scholars and the human beings who do *church planter* as work; for example, while church planters seem to search for bureaucratic routinization through meetings, they also seem to desire the appearance of creative performance through production tasks. In the next and final section, I consider how church planters wrestle with notions of occupation disestablishment.

Church Planter: A Disestablished Organizing Archetype?

Organizational communication scholars have argued that investigations of religious organizing often focus on established religious organizations, and by doing so, they miss “important dynamics of alternative organizational forms, especially when authority structures and institutional patterns have yet to be established” (Koschmann, 2013, p. 111). By examining the mix of tasks that make up *mundane/ministry work* for church planters, this chapter concludes by arguing that an important dynamic of church plants as “alternative organizational forms” is the (perceived) *disestablishment* of church planter work. Indeed, church planters described the organizations that their work attempts to create as “fluid” (Saul), “blank slates” (Braden), and “an amorphous animal” (Jenn). Tony explained, “a church plant has no framework, and so in order to work in a system here you have to have it first”, and Pete elaborated on the difficulties he faces working for a church plant, when compared to his earlier experiences working at an established church:

So here, nothing exists. There, something did. Both places, there are certain things a church does in terms of preaching, ordinances, that kind of stuff. But ... when I started that job, I was *never* thinking about, how do we make this a policy? How do we make this clear? How do we clarify expectations here, here, here? What kind of accountability systems do we need to have? That was just in place there, and you tweak it. But here, you’ve got to *create* it. (Pete’s emphasis added)

It is interesting that despite church planter constructions of their organizing as being “frameworkless”, my observations of their work suggests otherwise. For example, they have adopted work frameworks such as staff meetings because “everybody has a staff meeting” (Jack); principles of brand marketing where they consider “what colors pop”

when designing logos (Braden); and even styles of preaching that evoke images of high-tech conference presentations. Perhaps church planter perceptions of fluidity in their organizing are the result of competing frameworks for what their most important or valuable mundane/ministry tasks are; for example, some church planters identified “the real work church planters want to do” as involving ministry meetings (Saul), but others said “prayer is the most important work” that they do (Tom). Moreover, we might argue that by adopting multiple frameworks and claiming to have none, church planters are no more likely to do knowable work than other workers or community members are to recognize church planter work as an occupation.

The perceived lack of established organizing systems at church plants also results in the blurring of church planter work roles. Tom explained, “as a church planter, all the role lines are highly blurred”, and Jenn clarified, “here, we are all everything ... I’m constantly putting on different hats.” Other church planters and church plant staff members used similar language to describe the difficulty of telling others what they do, saying, “When people ask me what I do, I say I do a lot of different things. I feel like I wear a lot of different hats. They all kind of blur together, because it feels like ‘all hands on deck’ all the time” (Deb). Whereas “at a larger, more established church, you get very specialized” (Braden), the experience of having “all hands on deck all the time” can be challenging for church planters, especially because it makes it more difficult for them to learn what doing their job actually means for them:

You have a staff of people who are wearing different hats that they don’t necessarily wear in their norms. So, being part of a church plant here, I’m doing things that I’m not necessarily gifted in, or I’m not necessarily trained in, but I have to learn on the go and figure it out. (Terence)

Experiencing a sense of disestablishment and role instability during church plant work also plays out in the material workspace/places church planters inhabit. Multiple church planters expressed spatial uncertainty as an occupational challenge of church planter work. Craig explained, “One of my biggest challenges is, I don’t have an office. So I’m officing from home, which I hate.” Jenn described how the lack of an office generates additional task uncertainty, saying, “We don’t have an office. We don’t have a place where someone can come look over our shoulder and go, how is that project going?” Prior to one of our shadowing sessions, Braden tweeted, “Just pulled into Starbucks for the FOURTH time today. Four Times. #MyOffice”; and Tom, who is part of Braden’s church plant staff at Ephesus Church, elaborated on the difficulty of accomplishing church planter work at Starbucks or other places that seemingly represented the material disestablishment of church planter work:

For the first six to eight months, we would office at different random places, Starbucks, inside of Target – which is just not efficient. Starbucks in general is typically only efficient whenever you’re a lone ranger and not a team. That was a challenge.

Interestingly, Tom and the Ephesus Church staff now office in a relatively nondescript, generic-looking corporate office park. When I asked Deb, who is also an Ephesus Church staff member, about the experience of shifting from doing her work at a Starbucks to their current office space, she responded by describing how the spatial move also resulted in significant identity shifts:

It’s also been sweet to watch our team evolve from being the three of us meeting in Starbucks inside of Target for a staff meeting to now having an office – and what feels like a more established team, and seeing those relationships develop, and communication begin to happen more naturally, and a mutual understanding of one another.

Thus, for the Ephesus Church staff, the move into a corporate office space created not just a greater sense of work establishment, but also feelings of deeper connection with and understanding of other church plant staff members. This suggests that the *spatial* disestablishment of church planter work can also be emotionally taxing and relationally difficult for church planters. Importantly, this discourse also suggests that notions of corporate establishment are both spatially located and constructed as positive for church planters; for example, Deb attributes improved communication and “mutual understanding” to “having an office”. This is significant because it further highlights the tension of doing mundane/ministry work; on one hand, church planters valorize loosely bounded types of work that are characterized by heroically building systems where none exist, and on the other hand, they describe the mundane corporate establishment they experience by “having an office” as comforting and contributing a sense of stability to their everyday work and occupational identities.

Church planting and work/life balance. In addition to blurring church planter work roles and creating spatial work tensions, the disestablishment dynamic of church planter work also results in church planter “work rhythms” that are difficult to achieve and a church planter work/life boundary that is almost nonexistent. After describing his lack of a typical workday as “unfortunate”, Saul expressed, “I don’t have a whole lot of routine established in this context at all”; similarly, other church planters and staff members said “a typical workday almost has no rhythm” (Tom) and “I struggle to do just the normal same things every day” (Kason). Scarlett explained her struggle to put boundaries on her work, saying, “In ministry, work never ends. So, it’s always just living

it out day to day. You never know what you're going to deal with." Gerry affirmed Scarlett's thoughts, adding, "Church planting can take over your life. Everything you're doing is wrapped up in this church plant." And, while Pete explained, "really trying to avoid burnout is a major thing", he followed up by suggesting that doing people-centered church planter work means "chasing down people", and that often means working on off days. Jenn echoed Pete's thoughts:

You have to have people who are passionate about what they are doing in a church plant, and you can't have someone who is just going to come and punch a nine-to-five clock and say, "Done", because we're *always* dealing with people. (Jenn's emphasis added)

What we can discern from Jenn's commentary is a logic of doing disestablished church planter work that suggests that a work/life boundary is unlikely, unnecessary, or even unhelpful for church planters, and that being "passionate" about church planting work looks like being "on call" all the time. Kason used a similar logic to describe the relationship between the personal lives of church planters and *church planter* as an occupational identity: "This is the church, so it's like, your personal life is so important to your job. If your personal life is screwed up, then your job is screwed up. *You are really important to your job*" (emphasis added). Kason seems to suggest that because *church planter* is a disestablished occupation that also involves the personal faith of the worker, it is the responsibility of the worker to leverage their personal life in order to stabilize their occupation.

Problematically, the absence of established work rhythms coupled with vanishing work/life boundaries leaves some church planters attempting to mitigate these effects by searching for work-like rhythms in their family lives, marriages, and recreational

activities. Jack mentioned that he and his wife “always have a date night on Thursday, where it’s pretty non-negotiable no matter what comes up”, and Tom explained, “It doesn’t work to work all the time. Your marriage doesn’t work, your family doesn’t work – it just doesn’t work. We have established a pretty good rhythm that Thursday nights are sacred for my wife and I.” Additionally, Sean noted that “it’s hard to figure out that balance, because when do I turn off what, and turn on the other?”, suggesting that doing church planter work also makes it difficult for him to discern when his *church planter* identity should be “on or off”. Interestingly, Sean clarified that he “recently hired an assistant” in order to try and find more balance *at home*, rather than at work.

What is intriguing about Jack, Tom, and Sean’s commentary is the notion that in the absence of a rhythm at work, they attempt to establish a rhythm at home in the form of scheduled relational events with wives and families; in essence, managing their marriages and family time *becomes* a form of church planter work. Other church planters expressed feeling a responsibility to be “very intentional in guarding time with my wife” (Craig) and “very intentional about keeping my family number one ... you have to guard that” (Gerry). The language of “guarding” family time further complicates our understanding of *church planter* as an occupational identity, because it suggests that the disestablishment of church planter work means that church planters feel it necessary to defend themselves against their own occupation and its time hazards.

Finally, the influence of *church planter* as a disestablished occupation that is also intensively people-focused can extend beyond the home and into other life arenas, such as rest and recreation. Kason described church planter work as “hard, *but I think we rest*

hard too” (emphasis added), and Gerry explained how he uses working out and playing basketball to deliberately try to get away from doing church planter work:

A lot of the guys that know me, they don't ask me, “Gerry, are you working? What are you doing?” They ask me how I’m resting. So every Monday, I do a half-day. Monday morning, it’s me. I go work out. I’m at the gym. I need to go play basketball two or three times a week. *I have to go play ball, because on that court, nobody’s asking me a question about pastoring or their life.* (emphasis added)

Gerry’s response here is also intriguing because of his spatial specificity; when he says “on that court, nobody’s asking me a question about pastoring”, it appears that he envisions the basketball court as an island, a fixed space that takes on meaning as a real place he can go to escape the invasive emotional pressures of managing church planter work. In this vein, Braden described how the vanishing work/life boundary for church planters creates pressure for church planters to treat having “relationships outside the church” like work:

A lot of my best friends either go to our church or work at our church, and that’s good and bad. It’s good because, I hire people that I like, and so that’s important. I want to like the people I work with. *But I also really have to work hard at relationships outside the church.* And so people in my neighborhood, people on my son’s soccer team, old friends that I’ve known for years and years and years, I really have to be intentional about those to have those relationships. (emphasis added)

What we can take from Braden’s commentary here is that accomplishing *church planter* as a disestablished occupation that “can take over your life” (Gerry) also affects personal relationships – including preexisting friendships – by requiring church planters to manage those relationships as if that were also part of their job description, rather than part of their personal life that occurs away from work.

A question of professional jurisdiction. Because *church planter* is a relatively unknown and unrecognized occupational identity outside of contemporary Christian faith communities in the United States, this chapter focused on presenting observations of and claims about the inherent task features of doing church planter work. However, constructing this analysis revealed a key tension; specifically, though we might be able to point to a few tasks that church planter work may coalesce around, even church planters do not necessarily experience their occupation as having a “predictable job quality” (Ashcraft, 2013). Indeed, when thinking about the glass slipper as a framework for theorizing occupational identity, this chapter seems to respond by raising an additional question: How can job constituents across multiple sites navigate answers to *who* does their work, if they are not entirely certain how to identify *what* the work actually is? Importantly, however, this chapter also accomplishes a foregrounding of the enmeshment of mundane tasks and ministry tasks church planters take up as work, thereby establishing an emphasis on religion as difference throughout the remainder of my analysis for this project. Focusing on the ways that church planters accomplish religious work in tandem with forms of work that are not explicitly religious positions religion as “a framework for constructing social reality that people enact in daily interactions”, as well as a way of organizing church planter work identities in meaningful ways (Koschmann, 2013, p. 108; see also Buzzanell & Harter, 2006; Shenoy-Packer & Buzzanell, 2013).

Thus, I close this chapter by proposing three tentative arguments. In response to my first research question, this chapter showed how church planters, as everyday

jobholders, are involved in a complex and often confusing enmeshment of tasks that I refer to as *mundane/ministry work*. In accomplishing this work, church planters talk about and enact seemingly religious and “worldly” types of tasks – including going to meetings, praying at/as work, and producing church plant services – in complex and entangled patterns, such that discussing and accomplishing mundane work appears to become a prerequisite for doing ministry work, and vice versa. Moreover, due to the ambiguity of mundane/ministry work, defining *church planter* as a “new organizing archetype” that characterizes contemporary religious work shifts and occupational identities is not simple as defining what church planter work is – especially if the human beings who do church planter work experience and talk about their jobs as disestablished work (Ashcraft, 2013; Barley & Kunda, 2001). Thus, knowing *church planter* as an occupation requires knowing how church planters describe *who* should do mundane/ministry work – a question that my next two analysis chapters take on. Secondly, the struggle of doing disestablished work can often play out as an expressed struggle over material workspaces/places, given the notion that an established workspace/place might lend some sort of legitimacy or stability to perceptions of a disestablished occupational self. And finally, constructing and claiming seemingly disestablished occupational identities, including *church planter*, may contribute to a vanishing sense of work/life balance, such that managing life away from work *becomes* a form of work.

Crucially, there is more to the story of knowing church planter as an occupational identity and site of work. One significant issue that church planters in this study

continually grappled with is whether they identify as religious workers or entrepreneurial workers. As this opening analysis chapter suggests, making sense of *church planter* as an occupational identity is contradictory and often confusing – not just for the researcher and readers of this study, but for the persons trying to claim that occupational identity on a daily basis. In Chapters Five and Six, I attempt to make sense of this identity by investigating how church planters narrate stories of religious and entrepreneurial working selves – and how, in their attempt to claim multiple figurative practitioner identities at the same time, they appear to be unable to fully accomplish either, creating an indefinite contest over the “professional jurisdiction” of *church planter* as a (religious) working self (Ashcraft, 2013).

CHAPTER V

THE FIGURATIVE RELIGIOUS PRACTITIONER OF CHURCH PLANTING

Recent occupational identity scholarship has argued that the both the nature of work tasks and the organizations that they produce depend on “the figurative practitioners with whom such work is aligned”, such that “we might say that the construction of a prototypical practitioner yields the nature of work” (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 26). In other words, a more meaningful understanding of church planting as work requires moving beyond practical knowledge of *what* church planters do and investigating *who* church planters say they are. Thus, in order to begin exploring the discursive struggle over *church planter* as an occupational identity, this chapter builds on Ashcraft’s (2013) *glass slipper* metaphor to investigate how constituents of this identity across church plant worksites wrestle with, narrate, and embody *religious* responses to the question, *who does church planter as a line of work?*

Just as faith and spirituality is generated and sustained through communication (Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006), religious work identities, including assumptions about who *should* do certain forms of religious work, are organized and continually worked out in interactions with others (Koschmann, 2013). However, while organizational communication scholars have often conceptualized difference as rooted in variation between identity categories, thinking about religion as difference in more dynamic ways requires a more dynamic intersectionality framework. Thus, alongside Ashcraft’s (2013)

glass slipper metaphor, the remainder of this analysis also borrows from McDonald's (2015) queer research framework of knowing difference and intersectionality as rooted in normativity and conceptualized through an "anticategorical lens" (p. 321). Rather than emphasizing categorical identity difference, McDonald's (2015) framework highlights "how privilege and disadvantage are related to the ways in which organizational members enact – and do not enact – the taken-for-granted norms of organizational life", such as the way workers do or do not conform to and enact hegemonic masculinity (p. 322). This framework enhances our ability to capture how certain features of religious occupational identities are articulated and privileged as normative in certain ways – and, crucially, how normalized intersections between religion and other social identities, including gender, race, and class, may be actively or inadvertently challenged by the people who do religious work. In this, Chapters Five and Six respond to my second and third research questions: How do church planters and texts about church planter identities employ religious and/or economic discourses to make claims about and construct a figurative practitioner? And, how do assumptions about difference intersect with and participate in the occupational identity work of church planters, and in the creation of texts about church planter identities?

This chapter argues that church planters discursively construct a figurative religious practitioner to partially create and legitimize the occupational value and practice of *church planter* as a work identity within a complex, ambiguous context of discursive enactment and resistance. In this, a central tension that church planters grappled with is whether or not church planters are supposed to be religious or

entrepreneurial workers. This chapter shows that church planters employ and embody religious discourses to construct a figurative religious practitioner that variously endorses, contradicts, and resists notions of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship as an occupational identity and organizing morality, such that the figurative religious practitioner of church planting is *like* an entrepreneur, but cannot fully *be* an entrepreneur and remain classed as spiritually virtuous.

Moreover, building on the assumption that communication and talk about work constructs the work-body relationship, this chapter acknowledges that the church planter-body relation is an indeterminate intersection that is neither self-evident, nor a matter of economic or religious destiny; instead, like the entrepreneur-body relation, it is a “social construction contest” (Ashcraft, 2011). In this sense, this chapter also looks beyond work discourse to consider how associations between *church planter* and certain social identities symbolically and materially shape both the identity of religious work and contemporary American communities and places of worship. By doing so, I challenge the assumption that certain bodies “logically” or “naturally” align with religious work tasks in self-evident ways (Ashcraft, 2011).

To identify who a church planter should be as a religious worker, church planters participating in this study constructed visions of a figurative *religious* practitioner by drawing from and legitimizing the following occupational identity norms: 1) community servanthood, 2) a “gospel-centered” religious morality of work, and 3) a sense of calling. These three norms and their intersections with difference and social identities organize the discussion in this chapter. Then, in Chapter Six, I address church planter

constructions of a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner who is a visionary, risk-taking pioneer, and who is normalized according to certain privileged patterns of masculinity. To set the stage for this analysis, I first demonstrate the uncertainty with which church planters approach their own understanding of their religious occupational selves.

Church Planter: An Unknown Religious Worker?

As scholars of religious organizing have noted, many religious work identities problematically lack occupational standards or generalized identifiers that people who do such work can point to during identity work (Chang, 2003). Not only does *church planter* lack widespread occupational recognition or standard identifiers, but also the very participants I talked with were unsure about what it meant to actually be a church planter. Responses to the interview question “Who would you say a church planter is?” were varied and ambiguous; some participants identified church planters with other religious labels, such as “a seasoned pastor” (Johnny) or “the pastor planting a church” (Teresa), while others gave less specific religious answers, including “someone who is planting a church” (Craig), “an establiher of a new church body” (Mark), or the equivocal but revealing response, “I would say a church planter is a lot of different things” (Tony). Indeed, for the church planter to be “a lot of different things” at work suggests both a high degree of occupational ambiguity and problematically vague organizational identities, especially if, as Jenn suggested, church plants “take on many different forms *based on who you are*, what your goals are, and what your objectives are” (emphasis added).

Other participants suggested that defining *who* a church planter is may be

problematic because they make sense of *church planter* as a collective rather than individual religious work identity. Scarlett explained, “That’s a tricky question, because I don’t think of *a* church planter. I think of it as a body. It takes a body of people to make church planting happen” (Scarlett’s emphasis added). Deb echoed Scarlett’s answer in more detail:

I would say a church planter is definitely not just one person. I feel like it is a group that’s made up of a pastor or group of pastors and a small team. But also, I would say that it is anybody that is committing to come alongside and be a member, or even like a regular attender ... I think it’s a group of people that are collectively establishing something together.

Thus, while Chapter Four demonstrated that there is some agreement about *what* church planters do among the people doing church planter work, notions of *who* church planters are appear to be far more uncertain, such that *church planter* could refer to “anybody” – even individuals who are “regular attenders” but not “committed members”. Taken beyond a religious context, Deb’s answer suggests that certain occupations may be organized around figurative practitioners that seem to make work identity claims about both employees and individuals even loosely affiliated with the organization; and, knowing certain figurative practitioners may ultimately require thinking beyond *who* the glass slipper fits by asking whether such a slipper exists at all.

During my interviews with church planters, my follow-up question to “Who would you say a church planter is?” was “What do you say when people ask what you do?” Participant responses suggest that while notions about *church planter* as an occupational identity are ambiguous, the narrative identity work taken on to construct and claim this identity is further fragmented and incoherent. Some participants referred

back to a sense of collective identity, like Johnny, who explained, “When people ask me where I’m at, where I’m working, or what I’m doing, I always talk about how we are a church plant and that’s where I’ve been placed”, or Terence, who said that he tells people “I’m part of a church plant” when asked about his work. Others identified with specific church planter tasks, such as, “I say that I work with the kids in a church plant” (Teresa). Deb responded by doing identity work in the context of the interview itself: “I say I *work for* a church plant. But if I’m telling you now, like, yeah, I would say I’m a church planter. That feels silly to say, but that’s what I’ve been doing for the last year” (Deb’s emphasis added).

Deb’s assessment of her own church planter identity work as feeling “silly” highlights the discursive haziness church planters seem to wrestle with when making sense of who they are at work. Other participants described avoiding *church planter* as an occupational identifier altogether. Craig explained that when people ask him about his work, “I’ll usually lead with pastor. I usually don’t lead with church planter. That’s never necessary to me unless people want to talk about it.” Jack also expressed feeling more comfortable with *pastor* as an occupational identity: “I say I’m a student pastor of a local church plant. I don’t know why ... but I don’t think I would one hundred percent call myself a church planter.” Similarly, Scarlett said she tells people “I am a children’s pastor” when asked about her work, and added, “I don’t tell anybody that I’m a church planter except for that we are part of a church plant. I don’t identify myself as a church planter.” Gerry explained that church planters often identify with the term pastor instead of church planter because “when you say you’re a pastor, people can understand that.

They're not afraid of it"; Mark reiterated Gerry's commentary, and when asked to clarify why he tells people he is a pastor rather than a church planter, Mark said, "Because it's an understood term."

Mark's response implies that church planter identity work is difficult precisely because *church planter* is a religious occupational identity term that is not widely understood. Other church planters echoed the idea that along with a lack of typical workdays, the figurative church planter is unclear because "a lot of people don't know what church planting is" (Deb). Interestingly, there was also a lack of agreement about the contexts in which *church planter* is an understood occupational term or not. On one hand, Saul explained that "church planter is lingo that makes sense to people who grew up in the church, and outside of that, it doesn't"; on the other hand, Braden suggested that if he calls himself a church planter in conversations about his work, "a lot of people, even in the church, would follow up and go, what does that mean?" Similarly, Pete described the term *church planter* as "jargon", "Christianese", and "a meaningless label amongst the people we're trying to reach"; furthermore, Pete explained that when talking about his work, "I spend more energy on the work that we're about than trying to build out an identity."

Beyond the discursive haziness regarding whether *church planter* refers to one person or several, and if it is occupational terminology that is meaningful or not, church planters also expressed uncertainty about whether or not *church planter* is actually acceptable religious occupational terminology at all:

I don't know that it's really a title. I don't know that you would put on a business card "church planter". I think you'd put on the business card "pastor", and you're

just a pastor of a new church. I don't know that that would ever be a title that someone would wear. (Tom)

Taken together, this section is meant to demonstrate that *church planter* is a fragmented, unsettled, and evolutionary occupational identity, and that the actual workers doing this work are unsure about what this identity actually means for them and whether or not they should participate in *church planter* identity work. Moreover, we could argue that the discourse of church planters about *church planter* as a “meaningless label” serves to obscure constructed features of the figurative religious church planter based on assumptions of difference, such that certain religious and social identities come to appear as naturally aligned with *church planter*. For example, Pete's problematic statement that he spends “more energy” describing “the work that we're about” than “trying to build out an identity” suggests a lack of reflexive thinking about why the social identities Pete is able to embody may give him access to church planter work while denying that work to other identities.

Importantly, though the people doing church planter work seem to lack a coherent shared narrative about who they actually are as workers, their discourse did roughly coalesce around several normative features of who church planters *should be* as religious workers. Indeed, church planters in this study pieced together a figurative religious practitioner by discursively legitimizing three religious occupational identity norms: 1) community servanthood, 2) a “gospel-centered” religious morality of work, and 3) a sense of calling. In the remainder of this chapter, I investigate each of these norms in turn and question how they intersect with difference and social identities in ways that are variously encouraging and problematic.

“We’re Not Trying to Build an Empire”: Community Service & Difference

In this section, I show how church planters use notions of *community* as a discourse that gives their occupational identities a sense of local connection and meaning, value, and importance. Specifically, church planters contribute meaning to their occupational identities by constructing needs-based community service and relational care as religious work outcomes. Within this, I suggest that the figurative *religious* practitioner of church planting is actually normalized as feminine through discursive and practical alignment with social work – a normative pattern that is later resisted through talk about the “calling” as privileging religious masculinity. I also show how church planter assumptions about socioeconomic identities that emerge in community service discourses disadvantage urban communities as inherently deficient and helpless, and justify church planter work as necessary for urban salvation.

In *Church Planter*, Darrin Patrick (2010) argues that church plants “must not settle for one particular function but must be a teaching, praying, awe-inspired, classless, possession-sharing *community*” (p. 190; emphasis added). Patrick’s discursive idealization of the church plant as a community rather than an organization – or, for that matter, a church – reflects church planter descriptions of their occupational ideal as “someone who is passionate about seeing a community come together” (Scarlett) and “a relationship builder” (Teresa) who is “supposed to be helping people in some way.” (Jenn). Scarlett clarified that church planters should “actually find out, what is the need of that community where they plant” and be “intentional about offering that”, and Jenn added:

You have to know who is in your community or you are not going to succeed. You are not going to provide what they need ... You always want to be looking at meeting their needs, along with looking at the needs of their families and looking at the needs of the community.

Here, Jenn describes both knowing community members and providing “what they need” as markers of church planter *work* success. However, other church planters described not just meeting community needs, but *improving* the community as an expected outcome of successful church planter work; as Owen explained, church planter work is “supposed to make the community better, supposed to make the community safer. It’s supposed to make the community more child-friendly. It’s supposed to bring people together.” Terence clarified how ideal church planter work should “enhance” local communities:

The church has come in to the community to enhance it, and to engage it. It’s not the community coming to the church to enhance and engage it. So I feel like if any church is planted in any community, it should be the church that’s doing a lot of work to build up the community, as opposed to the other way around.

Importantly, church planters do not understand “enhancing the community” as a function of getting involved in local politics, but instead as an outcome of charitable care and creating new relational ties within the cities, communities, and people in which church planter work is done. In fact, as Sean explained, some church planters make sense of their community service work as shifting local politics altogether:

It’s a “good ol’ boy” network, where the same people who have been running the community are still doing that ... If they know you, they are going to welcome you. They are going to welcome people around you. If they don’t, they are going to create barriers. Well, the fun part for us is breaking those barriers down ... I’m trying to build community and help further the continuity and the affinity of people, so that different folks that may never interact with one another can interact together. I grew up in this community and I remember when I was a kid, just because I was Mexican, I wasn’t allowed into a lot of houses ... I never want

my kids to experience that, or any others.

Sean went on to explain that because church plants often lack strong establishment ties in a community, church planter work should “develop a church that not only is a body of people, but *a body of people that looks like their community*, where you have all different walks walking in the door” (emphasis added), such that the central question driving church planter work is, “What are we doing to love our neighbors?” Similarly, Saul described that his desire was to do church planter work that “reflected the unique ethos of this community, rather than me shaping it into something else.”

What this focus on serving communities by looking like the community seems to mean for church planters is a shift away from evangelical interest in what a February 2014 National Journal article called “blessing the lobbying agenda of the chamber of commerce” (“The end of American exceptionalism”). Indeed, that article argues that the decline of religious organizations in the United States may be partially attributed to a generation of Americans who do not totally reject spirituality, but instead spurn religious organizing and church work that gives in to “the temptations of state power.” By highlighting community service as an occupational identity norm, church planters seem to construct a figurative religious practitioner who is aware of growing American misgivings about the church as a political and financial stronghold. Teresa explained how this generational shift in the United States is influencing institutional shifts in the church, including the growth of church planter work:

I think there is a generation that is coming up that is realizing that a lot of the churches that are established and have a lot of programs are inwardly focused and doing a lot for their people, but not outwardly focused as much on establishing relationships with the community and doing things outside of their

walls for other people ... I think what you see is we're moving away from really beautiful buildings and really rigid program scheduling within the week to, gosh, I don't care where we meet. It can be a school or a bar or a movie theater. I just want people who don't know Christ to come and to have a relationship with them. I think it's a different kind of thinking that's happening.

Teresa's description suggests that the ideal church planter is responsible for a "different kind of thinking", one that is both specifically religious and marked by "establishing relationships with the community" and serving the community beyond the church, in places such as bars or movie theaters that *reflect the community, rather than the church*. Furthermore, community discourse defines the figurative church planter as prioritizing partnerships with other local service organizations that work within and reflect the community, even if they are *not* explicitly religious. Kason explained how this shapes church planter identities by contrasting them with entrepreneur/ship:

That's a contrast, because in the startup world, that's the name of the game: To beat everyone else. That is what it is. As you start really small, you're really competitive and you show how you're better. That's not the case here. We're not here to beat Common Community Church, or to beat Blessed Trinity, or to beat whatever ... One of my projects is to build a resource list – so, if you're struggling with homelessness, go here. If you're struggling with this, go here. On that list, I'm going to include other churches who are doing some great things. We're not going to reinvent the wheel. That's really exciting to me ... We view them as partners – anyone helping, even if they're not Christians – if you're doing some good stuff, we'll jump on board with that. We can partner with that. We're not trying to build an empire. (Kason)

Other church planters echoed Kason's thoughts by pointing to other community-oriented contrasts between the ideal church planter and entrepreneur/ship. For example, Gerry contrasted church planters with Steve Jobs, the former CEO of Apple, by saying, "Nobody's looking at Steve Jobs for counseling. Steve Jobs can say, "If you can't get with the vision, then you can leave." Here it's a little different than that. You need to

build into the people.” And Terence clarified how he views the difference between a community-oriented church planter and an entrepreneur: “You have to have a heart as a pastor. You don’t have to have a heart as an entrepreneur ... An entrepreneur doesn’t have to care about people. He can just use people to get what he wants. A pastor has to care about people.” Thus, church planters employ notions of community service, charitable care, and meeting local needs to discursively construct a figurative religious practitioner who is responsible for enhancing communities by doing organizing work that looks like and partners with communities.

Casting the church planter as a (feminine?) social worker. Church planter constructions of a figurative religious practitioner characterized by service work and relational care also reveal interesting gender assumptions embedded within religious identity discourse. Occupational identities associated with relational service work, including “social worker” and “helping professional”, have been described as professional identities that are normalized as feminine and motivated by an ethic of care (Lyocsa, Basistova, & Lyocsa, 2015; Freedberg, 1993; Ramvi & Davies, 2010; Walkowitz, 1990). Moreover, non-commercial work sectors have been thought of as feminine in general due to perceptions of their distance from masculine managerialism (Baines, Charlesworth, and Cunningham, 2015). Thus, for church planters to talk about and enact a figurative religious practitioner who is motivated by community service and cares, and it therefore aligned with social worker identities, suggests that *church planter* can be thought of, perhaps ironically, as a normatively *feminine* religious occupational identity. Following up on his earlier commentary about church planters needing to “have

a heart” and “care about people”, Terence explained how spirituality intersects with this feminine ethic of church planter care:

I think the difference between entrepreneurs starting a business, an awesome company, whatever it is, and the pastor that’s starting a church plant is, a pastor – he’s watching over people’s souls. He’s shepherding souls, and that’s a *heavy* weight. It’s a heavy weight because you’re dealing with people, and people got problems. So *every single day* you’re meeting with people and they surprise you with something. You go, “Oh, that’s *so* heavy.” You got to carry this. And then, all of a sudden, you got to get up and preach. (Terence’s emphasis added)

Even as Terence uses masculine pronouns to describe *church planter* (and perhaps speaks to religious patriarchy by suggesting that church planters should “carry” the problems of incapable others), it can be argued that he also feminizes *church planter* by privileging it as a religious occupational identity that is distinct from the entrepreneur because of its investment in spiritual care. In this, the idea that the figurative religious practitioner of church planting is feminine or even ambiguously gendered highlights the contradictory and constructed nature of *church planter* as a religious occupational identity.

Moreover, as Chapter Four demonstrated, spiritual care as a church planter work task often takes place through the relational work of one-on-one meetings with congregational members. As Ramvi and Davies (2010) argue, relational workers, or “professionals who work in close personal contact with other people and for whom empathy and the ability to build relationships are crucial” (p. 445), are not just aligned with a feminine ideal, but a nurturing and *maternal ideal*. Though we might typically think of religious leadership positions as patriarchal, through the lens of the “relational worker”, it can be argued that the figurative religious practitioner of church planting is

not only feminine but also *motherly*; indeed, the term “planter” itself evokes earthy notions of a gardener who nurtures and raises an organic plant. Interestingly, one church planter in this study told a story about doing garden work to serve a local community that evokes norms of nurturing relational work *and* hegemonic masculinity:

One of the more fun things that God has allowed us to be a part of in the last year was planting a community garden in a trailer park ... What that entailed was me going over there one day and asking the property manager if I could put up some flyers. And then I asked him, is there anything that you need done in this trailer park that you just don't have the resources, you don't have the time, or that you just really don't want to do because it's a crappy job? This grown man starts breaking down in tears ... I've had to train myself to make that the normal, to live in that kind of way. (Jack)

What I want to point out as meaningful in this story is the way Jack speaks to complex and even contradictory gender norms *without speaking to gender*; for example, he invokes the femininity of service work by highlighting the community garden as a caring sacrifice of his personal time and resources, and by storying the planting of the garden as emotionally moving. On the other hand, he also reveals the ways in which he privileges masculinity by characterizing the person crying in the story as a “grown man” who therefore might be unlikely to cry otherwise, and by talking about the need to “train himself” to make service work “normal” – training that we are left to assume Jack might not need if he were not a “grown man” himself. Moreover, another underlying assumption about *church planter* as an occupation is that church planters must be trained to professionalize the femininity of the figurative religious practitioner who does service work, such that this occupational figure remains within the purview of the religious male.

This section raises questions about whether or not religious work identities that

claim to prioritize charitable care for communities can be thought of as normatively feminine *in general*, despite historical and contemporary religious occupational rhetoric that constructs and protects patriarchies within religious work; later in this analysis, Chapter Six considers how the feminization of *church planter* in its alignment with social worker identities is mitigated as church planters openly celebrate (and, in some ways, deliberately practice) the hegemonic masculinity of the entrepreneur. In the next section, however, I consider how church planter identity work based on community service discourse also problematically intersects with and obscures assumptions about socioeconomic class identities, such that religious church planter identities are partially normalized according to their distance from notions of urban poverty.

The church planter as problematic urban savior. During the time I spent conducting observations at church plants and shadowing church planters, I witnessed or was told stories about church planters doing community service at and as work by providing food for disadvantaged community members, cleaning up public parks, planting urban community gardens, and working with inner-city adoption and foster care organizations. However, despite their good intentions, it is reasonable and necessary to question the ways that church planter assumptions about socioeconomic classes frame their community service discourse, specifically by characterizing urban communities as inherently deficient, helpless, and dependent upon church planter work and charity. Moreover, though church planters use discourses of community care to resist entrepreneurialism in some ways (such as Terence's commentary about "having a heart"), in other ways, the church planter as religious community servant whose work

should meet needs mirrors and privileges alignment with both Sørensen's (2008) "fairy tale entrepreneur", whose function and quality is that of an upper-middle-class "savior" with religious character (p. 86), and Gill's (2014) entrepreneurial "heroes", who partially made sense of their work "as having positive, almost heroic, impact on the public economy and society" by solving problems and "fixing needs" (p. 60).

The problematic nature of community service as a feature of the figurative religious practitioner of church planting begins as church planters discursively construct a religious obligation to cities and urban spaces. For example, the website of Orchard Group, a church planter network based in New York City, states, "Cities are the new frontier ... As the world becomes more urban, so must the church!" Not only should church planters "become more urban", but, as Darrin Patrick (2010) explains, church planters should "desire not just to have great churches but to have better cities" (p. 225). Patrick (2010) goes on to characterize taking religious, economic, and social responsibility for having "better cities" as an imperative of church planter work: "We should seek the spiritual welfare of the city, but also the financial and social welfare of the city." (p. 233).

Importantly, church planter discourse about "seeking the welfare" of the city inevitably turns its attention to urban communities, and ultimately characterizes these communities as inherently "difficult" places to do church planter work *because they are poor places*:

In our cultural setting, the values of community (we should live life together) and social justice (we should serve the poor) are deep-seated values for many people outside the Christian faith. These values are biblical values. The church can accept and enter into the human desire to connect and to help the less fortunate

because both community (Acts 2:42-47) and serving the poor (Proverbs 14:31) are biblical. This emphasis on community and service is one of the keys to why many Acts 29 churches are growing in *the difficult soil of urban contexts*. (Patrick, 2010, p. 198; emphasis added)

The notion that serving the poor is biblical church planter work that occurs in “difficult” urban contexts carries with it the implicit assumption that sub-urban work contexts are somehow “less difficult” because they are “less poor”. Church planters that I interviewed spoke from similar assumptions, explaining that church planter work should be “making a difference in a tough, urban place” that has “a lot of challenges” (Pete), and that church planters should “go into the most awful, darkest parts of our city” to “reach those people” (Jack). This identity work constructs the church planter as a sort of courageous urban savior, who leaves the comfortable confines of American suburbia to “go into” the tough and terrible city in order to rescue the poor from their urban plight.

Similar to Gill’s (2012) problem-solving entrepreneurial heroes, church planters understand their community service work as providing value to urban communities by fixing problems that are assumed to inherently belong to urban communities. Darrin Patrick (2010) suggests that church planters “can move from being among the many who are recognized as problem-finders in the city to being the ones who are recognized as problem-solvers in the city”, specifically by “involving ourselves in the soil of what makes the city, the city”; and though church planters “have not solved the problems of poverty; neighborhood destabilization; un- and underemployment; severe racial division; drug, sex, and human trafficking; and high crime rates”, they should still make an effort to “build relationships with those most in need” (p. 211; 228-229). Similarly, Acts 29’s website identifies church planters as necessary to solve the problem of “the absence of

biblically qualified leaders in the urban context”. The discourse of church planters as privileged problem-solvers in inherently problem-ridden urban contexts also shapes church planter constructions of community members as unaware of their problems without church planter intervention:

I think you’re going to go into the heart of that city like you are as a missionary when you go on a mission trip. When you’re on a mission trip and you land in that foreign country ... You’re trying to read into the culture and figure out, what in the world are these people longing for? What are they missing? What do they need? They don’t even know what they need sometimes, and I think it’s the very same way when you’re church planting. (Jack)

Moreover, church planter assumptions about poor urban communities that lack awareness of their own needs also facilitates notions of an invisible lower class, from whom little should be expected. For example, Teresa said, “There is a lot of our city that is really poor that you don’t even see, and so we want to meet the needs of all those people and not forget anybody”, and Jack, when describing his service work with residents of a public housing complex, explained, “we have learned to love them ... where we don’t expect anything out of them, but we pray for them.”

Finally, discursive privileging of the church planter as urban savior and problem solver tends to obscure the way that church planter movements into urban city centers may contribute to the displacement of cultures altogether. Interestingly, some church planters in this study specifically wrestled with how to respond to this spatial tension and its generational effects:

The good and bad thing is that you’re getting a younger generation of people moving into the city – a progressive mentality of moving back into the city, where they’re yearning for something like this in a diverse community, yearning for something that looks like the city, this urban culture. The bad thing is that you’re shifting people that are in the city, out of the city – gentrification. So

we're dealing with stuff that's beyond saving people. (Gerry)

Thus, as church planters construct an occupational identity that responds to this “generational yearning” for diverse community through service and fixing needs in cities, they may also narratively (and perhaps unconsciously) endorse gentrification effects by characterizing poor urban bodies as difficult, and “less poor” church planter bodies as desirable for solving poor urban problems. Ultimately, while church planters may normalize community service with good intentions, this discourse also reveals problematic assumptions about socioeconomic identities, such that church planters justify their work by claiming to have special insight into urban community needs that poor urban community members lack, rendering them unable to escape their problems without the intervention of religious workers like church planters. In the next section, I describe how church planters adopt a specifically religious morality of work.

The “Gospel”: An Anti-Capitalist(?) Morality for Religious Workers

This section attempts to generate a fuller accounting of religion as a dynamic organizing ethic by considering how church planter discourse constructs a spiritually and practically *moral* figurative religious practitioner. Thus, this section serves studies of religion, work, and entrepreneurship by demonstrating how church planters, as religious entrepreneurs, define and enact their occupational identities according to an idealized religious morality. Specifically, I show how church planters utilize the narrative of the “gospel” as a theological morality discourse that redefines successful church planter work and workers by resisting entrepreneurial moralities of wealth accumulation and growth, thereby making religion and capitalism *uncomfortable* bedfellows, as opposed to

their apparent comfort level within Protestant work ethic discourse (Thomas & Mueller, 2000). Moreover, I show how a gospel-centered work morality also intersects with a multiracial identity consciousness that resists the whiteness of the entrepreneurial identity archetype (Essers & Benschop, 2007).

First, it is necessary to establish how theological narratives are central to church planter communication and talk about their own work and organizing. Church planter networks, such as Acts 29, describe church planting as an explicitly “theological enterprise” that should be “driven and shaped by theology”, such that theology should be viewed and used as a “tool” (Acts 29 website). Furthermore, both church planter networks and individual church planters identify the gospel as the narrative crux of church planter work, and characterize the gospel as a guiding theology expressed through a story of supernatural grace and forgiveness. The Acts 29 website summarizes the gospel metanarrative in the following way:

We believe the gospel is the good news of what God has graciously accomplished for sinners through the sinless life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection of his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, namely our forgiveness from sin and complete justification before God.

Then, the Acts 29 website goes on to suggest that church planters should be “passionate about gospel centrality.” Accordingly, church plants in this study followed suit, with the Sardis Church website claiming, “The gospel is at the center of everything we say and do”, while the Philadelphia Church website describes their church plant as “a church centered on the gospel – everything we do is shaped by what Jesus did for us 2000 years ago.” Gospel discourse is present in local church planter talk as well; during an observation session on a Sunday morning at Philadelphia Church, Mark pointed to the

congregation as we stood in the back of the room and told me I was seeing “the gospel made visible, or like, a gospel outpost.” Similarly, Pete described Sardis Church as “a new gospel-shaped community”, and a Sardis Church promotional flipbook given to me by Pete states, “If we had just 30 seconds to introduce ourselves to you, we would tell you we believe that the gospel of Jesus changes everything.”

Because church planters construct the gospel as a theological metanarrative that shapes “everything” about their work, the gospel comes to be interwoven with the religious figurative practitioner, such that fluency with gospel discourse signifies the church plant worker *as moral*. As Tom explained, “Primarily, a church planter is *someone who cares about the gospel of Jesus Christ*” (emphasis added). Other church planters described themselves as “somebody who’s trying to provide access to the gospel” (Saul), or “essentially just a child of God, taking the gospel of God to a new people of God” (Pete), while the Acts 29 website identifies “healthy” church planters as “secure in the gospel”. Thus, gospel discourse is naturalized as a theological language necessary to communicatively express a *moral* figurative church planter who first and foremost values the gospel.

Practically, what this means for church planters is a redefinition of what counts as “good” or “successful” work. Jack suggested that church planters should use work time for “re-learning and re-preaching the gospel to yourself”, and Gerry explained that the gospel redefines how church planters understand the communicative obligations of religious individuals across *all* occupations:

Regardless if I was a church planter, or a pastor, or if I was just somebody working in the business world, that's what I *should be* doing – I *should be* sharing the gospel. (Gerry's emphasis added)

Interestingly, the adoption of the gospel as a moral occupational narrative also emerges in church planter identity discourse in the form of critiquing individualism and resisting the capitalist morality of Western entrepreneur/ship. For example, during a Sunday morning sermon, I observed Craig denouncing the way “Americans have turned the gospel into me-ism”; and, while I shadowed Braden during an Ephesus Church staff meeting, he openly lamented about how “money issues are bred into Americans”, such that we “fear our finances” and “idolize money” by “obsessing over our savings accounts rather than the gospel.” Braden went on to warn other Ephesus Church staff members that church planters should avoid being distracted by money, saying, “pastors are unlikely to make a lot.” Jack also critiqued American individualism, explaining his frustration with the religious mindset that “I am an American and I go to church, and *that* makes me a Christian” (Jack's emphasis added), instead of Christianity entailing “deep, gospel-centered relationships with God and others.” When I asked Jack what a “gospel-centered relationship” is, he told me a story about how he became friends with a gay man who manages a property in Jack's neighborhood. Jack explained that at one point in their friendship, he invited this property manager to church after telling him the gospel story:

So of course, in that moment, I was prayerfully expecting him to respond and to want to come to our church, but he didn't. And that didn't mean that all of the sudden I have written him off. I'm still involved in his life, and I'm still praying for him, and we're still having gospel conversations. After we have those conversations, he still tells me a lot of the deeper stuff going on in his life. And so I still don't expect anything as far as an entrepreneurial sort of, “Well, we

need a product out of that.”

What is interesting about this story is the way that the gospel, as a theological metanarrative that distinguishes Jack’s evangelistic work, shapes both the religious work Jack is doing *and* his expectations about what constitutes an equitable outcome of that work. Thus, for the religious figurative practitioner, the gospel comes to mean more than a story about Jesus; instead, it reorganizes the discursive framework church planters use to characterize morally “good” work that “should” be done.

Moreover, whereas organization scholars have noted Weber’s understanding of the calling as mitigating religious concerns about financial profitability, and thus spreading capitalism as a uniquely moral American ideal (Gill, 2013), the gospel can be understood as a morality of religious work that resists entrepreneur/ship (and, in turn, the capitalist morality of the Protestant Ethic) by *raising* concerns about making money. These concerns are often stated explicitly in talk about who church planters should be and what their work priorities should look like:

Pastors who love money will eventually put that love before the good of the church. They will make decisions to ensure their own job security and salary increase, decisions that the majority of the time will hinder the forward progress of the gospel. (Patrick, 2010, p. 53)

In this passage, church planters who “make decisions to ensure their own job security and salary increase” are not celebrated as an entrepreneur who makes similar decisions might be; instead, these church planters are criticized as inevitably prioritizing money over the “good of the church” and, crucially, as stopping the “forward progress of the gospel”. Taken together with church planter critiques of American individualism, notions of the gospel as an anti-capitalist work morality partially construct a religious

figurative practitioner who is ethically bound to resist entrepreneurial accumulation as a work outcome.

Success, failure, and the gospel. As a theological discourse that organizes both the religious occupational morality and the expected occupational outcomes of church planters, the gospel metanarrative goes beyond raising concerns about making money to redefining how church planters understand success and failure at work altogether. Deb spoke about how the gospel draws certain boundaries around what success should look like for church planters:

From a worldly standard, you would think that a church plant would be successful based on the amount of people that are coming to their church, or the amount of people that are serving at their church, or the amount of money that's coming into their church – all of these numeric and monetary values that really hold no meaning at all ... I feel like success for a church plant is so hard to define. But I would say success for a church plant would be ... the gospel going forth.

Jack echoed Deb's thoughts about success, suggesting, "Worldly success would just be, let's get a ton of people in those seats no matter what it takes ... I'm not interested in wasting my time to see worldly success if it doesn't mean the real gospel." Similarly, Jenn explained, "When you talk about success in a church, that's where church and business are diverse. Business is successful because of numbers, numbers, numbers. In church, you have to look at ... are people actually connecting in their faith?" Kason added, "It's different than the world's definition of success. It centers on faithfulness – because sometimes church plants don't grow numerically", and Teresa attempted to clarify what a gospel-centered success metric could look like:

You cannot measure success by the number of people coming ... But we can measure success by the number of times that our people are reaching out and

finding their neighbors or finding their coworkers or finding whoever, praying for them, talking to and sharing Christ with them, and inviting them to church. (Teresa)

Thus, gospel discourse shapes the figurative religious practitioner of church planting as rejecting growth and accumulation as success metrics; these metrics, which may be considered marks of success for the entrepreneur, are instead characterized as “worldly” and therefore out of step with the gospel-centered morality of the ideal church planter. In this sense, as religious workers attempt to discursively accomplish *church planter* as an occupational identity, they must adopt a morality of work that denies them entrepreneurial success even as they take on entrepreneurial forms of labor.

Practically, a gospel-based discursive redefinition of success and failure also plays out among church planters through talk about rejecting the so-called “megachurch model” as an ideal outcome of religious organizing work. Sean stated, “Because of networks like Acts 29 and church plants like that, we don’t want a megachurch anymore”, and Deb explained, “People are realizing that not everybody loves gigantic, huge churches or megachurches”. Tom described how a belief in the gospel as defining “good” religious work is also reshaping how contemporary church workers create their organizations:

There is an awareness within the church that the megachurch model – get everybody from fifty square miles to come to the same spot – is becoming less and less effective for the sharing of the gospel. So, I think that people are starting to realize that it’s easier to mobilize smaller groups. It’s easier to galvanize and unify and work together. I think it’s easier to do when we’re smaller.

Thus, gospel discourse shapes what “good” and successful church planter work looks like by redefining the types of organizing contexts in which successful church planter

work should take place. Furthermore, church planters extended the gospel metanarrative to suggest that a church planter “can fail and have a huge church plant” (Owen). Kason described church planter failure as “selling your soul to gaining a crowd”, and Saul explained failure as “getting larger and becoming popular” and “falling in line with all the other “next big things” that we’re surrounded by”. Gerry described how the communication of the gospel narrative act as the moral measure of success for the ideal church planter: “It could be a ten thousand person church that you’re preaching for, but if you’re not preaching the gospel – that’s a failure in my eyes.”

Importantly, as a theological narrative of morality at work that partially answers the question, *who does church planter as a line of work?*, notions of the gospel seem to identify the ideal church planter as motivated by a reflexive ethic of compassion and proximity to community concerns. For example, Terence expressed failure as “not caring for people well”, and clarified that for church planters, the “number one goal is, you want to preach the gospel – but Jesus had compassion for his people. He wept. And a pastor has to be there weeping with people.” Pete described how a gospel-centered morality of work that prioritizes compassion can redefine enterprising success as failure:

I firmly believe we could be failing and have great numbers – because the Bible never tells me to reach a certain amount of people, and it never tells me to have a certain kind of budget, but it tells me to do other things. We could be failing if we have all those things, and we’re moving mountains, but we don’t have love.

Taken together, the data in this section thus far highlights how a morality of work based on the gospel as a theological discourse seems to pose an alternative to the Protestant work ethic, such that religion and capitalism no longer comfortably enable and enact each other in the occupational identity work of church planters. In the next section, I

show how the gospel metanarrative also intersects with church planter assumptions about race and ethnicity, such that the figurative religious practitioner of church planting can be partially understood as resisting the implicit whiteness of Western entrepreneurialism (Essers & Benschop, 2007).

The gospel and racial identity in church planting. Across network messages and local talk about church planter work, church planters use the gospel as a linguistic theme to communicate a surprising multiracial identity consciousness at work, wherein both church planting as labor and Christianity as a faith are to be intentionally reorganized for racial inclusivity. The Acts 29 church planter network website claims, “Ethnic harmony and global diversity are integral to what it means to be explicitly Christian ... Our different cultures carry individual history, traditions, and legacies, but the gospel transcends them.” Beyond defining “ethnic harmony” as a central meaning for Christianity in general, Acts 29 describes racial inclusivity as a church planter work *competency*, such that the moral church planter “knows the power of the gospel to reconcile, resulting in ethnically, socially, and economically diverse churches which display the power of the gospel to bring people together.” Furthermore, church planters talk and write about racial inclusivity as an organizing norm that should be intentionally chosen by church plant workers. For example, Tim Keller, an author and church planter in New York City, writes in a pamphlet titled *Why Plant Churches* (2002), “Racial groups in a community are best reached by a new church that is *intentionally multi-ethnic from the start*” (emphasis added). And, in a blog post hosted on the Acts 29 website titled “Diversity isn’t the goal ... community is” (2014), Jerome Gay, a Black

church planter, described how church planters who believe in the gospel should “platform and empower” non-white religious workers:

It’s not enough to have a black person emcee or sing at a predominately white congregation or vice-versa, it’s vital that you’re actively seeking to empower people of different races on the executive level of your church. I’m not saying to make someone an elder just because they’re different racially and culturally, but in order to have diverse eldership/leadership it has to be something that you intentionally pursue ... The gospel is not colorblind, it’s color-engaging.

Interestingly, Jerome’s description of the gospel as a “color-engaging” organizing morality emerged in church planter talk during interviews and observations as a specific critique regarding perceptions of cultural whiteness in American religious organizing. For example, when I asked Jack what challenges his community created for Sardis Church, he pointed to cultural racism, saying, “I grew up in this town and understand that racism maybe isn’t as blatant, and you don’t see it written on stuff, but it’s just people don’t associate with people that don’t look like them, talk like them, play like them” before adding, “What God is calling us to is not to be white Republicans who show up to church on Sunday.” Similarly, while I observed a Smyrna Church staff meeting – in which all of the attendees were White – one church employee said, “The fact that we’re all white makes me sick. It speaks of our judgment, because we won’t make a place for other races or groups. If that’s what we do, then we’re just a club for white people.”

By using gospel discourse to partially construct a figurative religious practitioner who is conscious and perhaps critical of whiteness as a problematic norm of American Christian organizing, church planters can be thought of as resisting the entrepreneur as an occupational archetype residing in the “symbolic universe” of whiteness (Essers &

Benschop, 2007). The notion of *church planter* as an occupational identity that resists whiteness specifically emerged during my observations at Philadelphia Church, whose staff and congregational membership is majority non-white. While I shadowed Gerry – who is Black and works as the lead church planter at Philadelphia Church – to a breakfast meeting with other church plant workers, he described how his racial identity shapes his religious work:

I hear people say that we should act like there is no color, and I think that's ridiculous. They say, "Why can't you just get over it?" Because we *can't* just get over it ... I have a history, a cultural background that makes me who I am. Part of that identity for the Black community is the church. They are used to having a church to go to. So if we look like a white church, they won't come, because they'll feel like they lost that too. We have to respect and honor our history, not act like it doesn't exist. (Gerry's emphasis added)

Mark, who was hired by Gerry to work as a church planter at Philadelphia Church, explained that Gerry's vision of *church planter* as a religious occupation that respects and honors racial and ethnic histories operates practically "like a tangible stake in the ground", such that it challenges Philadelphia Church workers and members to answer the question, "Do you believe in this expression of the gospel message being multiracial?"

What is interesting here is the way that Mark characterizes the gospel message as *tangible* in its multiracial expression. For Philadelphia Church, this means that the gospel is not only a religious story of spoken tradition, but also a way of knowing religious bodies as expressing church planter work. For example, the "About Us" page of the Philadelphia Church website says, "Our diverse body is a testament to the reconciling power of the gospel"; and, when I asked Mark how Philadelphia Church

planters measure success at work, he said that they look at the tangible bodies around them as evidence of accomplishing the gospel as a multiracial expression of religion:

Your metrics as an entrepreneur are almost entirely about profitability. As a church planter, you're having to come up with different metrics ... If you're trying to plant a multicultural church, a multiracial church like we are here, a really simple metric is just to look at the room and see how diverse it is.

Importantly, this tangible awareness of racial identity and ethnic diversity also shapes *where* Philadelphia Church planters do their work. Mark explained that he draws inspiration from the New Testament of the Bible, which depicts “Jews and Greeks worshipping together – two people groups that were supposed to hate each other”:

Fast forward to today. We're trying to say, “Okay, how do we put that same value into practice?” And you come into a city like Philadelphia that's very, very divided racially between neighborhoods, and you say, “We're going to help start a church right in the middle, right in the nexus of these neighborhoods”, where you go west and it's all African-American, you go north-ish and it's all Hispanic, you go east and it's all white. And then we're going to find a church planter where he's African-American and his wife is Belizean. So yeah, that would be a very strong vision, but it's not to be cool. It's because it's an accurate expression of the gospel message – that it is for everyone.

This “strong vision” also plays out by changing the communication patterns that mark Philadelphia Church planter work tasks. For example, during my observations at a staff meeting, Gerry led the other staff members through a discussion about a book on racial justice dialogues; then, during their Sunday church services that week, Gerry openly promoted an event hosted by Philadelphia Church called “A Conversation About Race” using a photo of the 1963 Birmingham marches during the Civil Rights Movement. Kason, who works at Philadelphia Church and is white, explained how this multicultural organizing ethic creates communication tensions for church planters at Philadelphia Church:

It's challenging to navigate multiple cultures because those ethnicities bring with them a different culture. Each person has a different way they view the world and the way they operate, and so you've got to be able to speak maybe sometimes literally multiple languages. So, how do you speak to one person? You've got to learn how to speak to another person ... How do you talk about the church? In an African-American church, you're going to talk about the church a lot different than you are to the hipster barista from Kansas City who dropped out of college and is in a startup coffee shop. So you're going to have to learn to talk to people different ways.

Kason's commentary suggests that the figurative religious practitioner of church planting navigates multicultural tensions at work by learning to speak multiple "languages" – that is, by trying to learn and communicate from within the different ways that people of different ethnicities and races view the world. Thus, as a result of adopting a morality of work based on a gospel narrative that is "color-engaging", *church planter* as an occupational identity is marked by the ability to talk about the church according to diverse racial and ethnic identities.

Ultimately, church planters employ the gospel as a theological narrative of moral work that redefines success by raising rather than assuaging concerns about capitalistic growth and financial accumulation. The gospel narrative also intersects with church planter assumptions about race and ethnicity to resist the normative whiteness of both the Protestant work ethic and the entrepreneur as an identity archetype. Within this, church planters partially construct a figurative religious practitioner of church planting who resists church planter accomplishment of the entrepreneur as an occupational identity. In the next section, I discuss how church planters describe the figurative religious practitioner as "called", and how they attempt to navigate gender assumptions using notions of the calling as a masculine religious occupational identity marker.

The “Calling”: A (Super)Natural Work Qualification

Some say they don’t believe in a call to ministry. I say that’s because you’re not called. Everyone is called to ministry at some level, but not everyone is called to vocational ministry. (Braden)

This commentary from Braden reflects a common understanding among church planters about the “calling”: The figurative religious church planter bears a unique calling and supernatural vision for ministry – including *but not necessarily limited to* church planting – as a vocation. This distinction is important, because it suggests that church planters view the calling as general religious work qualification that governs the whole of their working identities and distinguishes church planting as a spiritual vocation. In his book *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission* – a text that makes an argument for who an evangelical Christian church planter should be – author Darrin Patrick, himself a church planter, writes: “If you don’t feel a sense of calling to ministry, then please, find another vocation! Only those ... who have a strong, fiery calling from God should pursue pastoral ministry” (2010; p. 30). Here, Patrick suggests that the ideal church planter must “feel a sense of calling” – not necessarily to church planting, per se, but to doing religious ministry like church planting *as work*.

While some participants in this study stated that they did feel a direct call to church planting as a form of work – like Jenn, who explained directly, “I experienced a call to church planting” – other church planters I interviewed and observed expressed feeling called to religious work in general, or *not* feeling called to church planting at all. Teresa offered that although she did not feel called to church planting specifically, she does “feel called to serve in churches”, and Tom explained, “I felt distinctly called to

vocational ministry ... But to be a church planter, it's hard to answer that. I don't know that I was called to be a church planter." Deb echoed Tom's explanation: "I had a specific calling to do vocational ministry ... I don't feel like I was necessarily called to church planting. I feel like I was called to this church and this community." This understanding of the calling characterizes church planting as a sort of spiritually utilitarian expression of supernatural influence on the occupational identity of church planters. For example, Kason explained, "I feel called to this specific situation, and God made me more and more committed to church planting itself as I came here." Similarly, Owen said, "Calling is funny. My calling has been God giving me steps ... this is where it led me", and Saul defined the calling as "whatever doors open in front of us – that's the calling."

Whether church planters experienced a calling to church planting or not, or in specific or more generic terms, the presence of a "calling" as a taken-for-granted feature of their occupational identity narratives suggests that the figurative religious practitioner of church planting should feel called to vocational religious work. Moreover, church planters explained that the way a person experiences or expresses their calling qualifies them for (and can *disqualify* them from) doing church planter work. Because the calling is "all-divine" (Johnny), participants explained that those who are qualified for ministry work by a calling *should* have "felt that call through prayer" (Jack). Scarlett explained how she used prayer to discern her calling as a supernatural work qualification:

I committed to praying for several months, just saying, "God, if this is not what you're calling me to, then just close that door" ... I would say, "Okay, God, if this is where you want us, make it very clear." So for me, it was a calling, because I would've never taken on something like this without God saying

clearly, “You are qualified ... If I call you, you’re qualified.”

Explicit in Scarlett’s explanation is a narrative of the calling as a required qualification for claiming a religious work identity; more implicit, however, is Scarlett’s understanding of the calling as a “naturalized” feature of church planter identity that must be acquired supernaturally. Along these lines, church planters seemed to use the calling to distinguish church planter identities as legitimately acquired or not. Jack explained, “I think sometimes church planters, they just had a bad experience somewhere else, and all of a sudden, they think that God has called them to make something else up out of nothing. I don’t know about that”, and Johnny stated, “A lot of these people that are planting churches step away and say, “Okay, if *I* were to do it, this is how *I* would do it, and this is where they’re wrong” ... But I think the original motive in doing that is wrong” (Johnny’s emphasis added). Jack and Johnny suggest that doing church planter work based on *natural* (that is, *human*) experiences or desires reveals impure motives and a lack of supernatural qualifications, thereby disqualifying a person from fully accomplishing *church planter* as a religious work identity.

Interestingly, however, the notion that calling should not be based on personal experiences seems to be directly contradicted by Scarlett’s earlier comments about praying on her own and deciding God was indeed calling her to church planter work. Thus, a significant question raised by church planter discourse about calling is what church planters point to as evidence of a “true” calling; while an entrepreneur, for example, might be able to “prove” that identity claim by pointing to capital, products, or a storefront, church planters must figure out how to look like and enact the part of a

“called worker” – despite the obscurity of *church planter* as an occupational image. This begins to generate some explanation for why church planter work takes on certain embodied frameworks, such as the preaching church planter wearing plaid button-downs, jeans, and a face mic like an entrepreneur at a high-tech conference. In this sense, evidence of calling may be communicated by bodily alignment with visions of other popular occupational images, which calls into question the degree to which the “calling” itself is a religious or secular identity work construct.

Other participants suggested that the absence of the calling as a supernatural calling and motivation for doing church planter work actually reveals significant character flaws in church planters:

A lot of guys plant churches because they have authority issues and can't get along with people in the church. They can't work for anybody, so they just start their own. Probably, some of those are successful because there are some natural leaders, but that's probably a big reason why so many church plants close – because it's just some guy that couldn't get along with anybody and that has been fired from several churches, so he gets to start his own. But he's not called, he didn't have the leadership to do it, and so he doesn't make it. (Craig)

Craig's narrative reveals an understanding of the ideal church planter as a masculine figure who can submit to authority as well as “get along with” and “work for” others as evidence of his suitability for and calling to church planter work. Moreover, in Craig's characterization of illegitimate church planters as lacking a divine calling and therefore likely to fail, he also implies an understanding of work success *as a consequence of calling*; thus, the ideal church planter, whose calling is assumed, *should not fail in their work*. In the next section, I consider how church planters construct the calling at the intersection of religion and gender assumptions.

Normalizing (and resisting) the calling as masculine. By (super)naturalizing the calling as a taken-for-granted feature of religious occupations and work identities, church planters also discursively normalize a figurative religious practitioner that is both specifically Christian and strategically masculine. First, participants in this study demonstrated a lack of critical reflexivity about their assumption that someone who is called to church planting *should* assume a Christian worldview. For example, Pete stated directly, “A church planter is a Christian – so, a follower of Christ – who feels called by Christ to begin a new work.” Here, Pete expresses an understanding of both the calling to religious vocations and the identity of *church planter* as Christian. Thus, the calling as a normative feature of religious work serves to ensure the elite status of Christian work and workers within *church planter* occupational identity discourse (Ashcraft, 2013).

Secondly, the calling also plays a key role in church planter struggles over gender identity positions. Some church planters leaned on the calling to divide church planter labor according to religious assumptions about gender. At a basic level, the normativity of the calling as masculine can be observed in church planter language; for example, by saying “*he’s* not called, *he* didn’t have the leadership to do it, and so *he* doesn’t make it” when distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate callings to church planter work, Craig demonstrates that church planter identity work may normatively use masculine identifiers. At a more meaningful level, however, church planter discourse privileges the calling as an organizing norm that legitimizes men doing religious church planter work; for example, Darrin Patrick’s (2010) book states, “I am continually shocked at how many men are trying to do ministry without a clear sense of

calling” (p. 30); later, Patrick adds:

The called man cannot imagine going into another vocation: He daydreams about ministry, he talks about ministry, and he cannot wait to be in ministry. There is an abiding, relentless desire for the work of ministry that the called man cannot shake off or ignore – even amidst hardship, persecution, and fear. (p. 36)

Patrick describes a figurative church planter who is obsessive about religious work to the point that *he* is willing to work relentlessly and be tough in the face of difficulty; and, underlying Patrick’s commentary is the suggestion that other vocations are more suitable for women, who are unlikely to have such “abiding, relentless desire” in the face of occupational difficulty. Tony echoed this discourse by describing church planters as “wired to be that lead, preaching guy”; moreover, Gerry suggested that the “relentless desire for the work” of church planting described in Patrick’s book should only be available to and expressed by men who have experienced a call to religious work:

I get scared of the guy that says, “I *want* to be a church planter” or “I *want* to be a pastor”. I’m like, why? That’s not something I went around saying. I never understood why you aspire to be that if the Lord hasn’t called you to do that.

Gerry’s commentary reiterates other explanations of the absence of a calling as disqualifying a religious worker from being a church planter, but by describing men who express a personal desire to be a church planter as “scary”, Gerry also disadvantages religious workers who do not experience a calling in a certain way as *less than men*. Thus, church planter discourse about the calling serves to construct a figurative religious practitioner who is not only called because he is a man, but also *a man because he is called*. Through McDonald’s (2015) framework of normativity, the masculinization of the calling can be thought of as an attempt to distance *church planter* from femininity as an organizing norm of social work. In other words, because alignment with service work

results in the *feminization* of church planter work, male church planters protect a masculine purview over religious work by discursively normalizing the calling as granting occupational access to males.

However, it is important to note that women church planters in this study still talked about themselves as being called, apparently contradicting the normalization of calling as located within the symbolic universe of the male. Thus, it may be possible to view the calling as simultaneously reiterating and resisting the Protestant Work Ethic; that is, even as evangelical church planters describe their figurative religious practitioner as a “called man” who has an “abiding” and “relentless” work ethic, they also prioritize an individual relationship with and accountability to God – thereby authorizing women church plant workers to claim an individual calling, especially since the calling itself lacks evidence beyond individual perception. In this sense, what calling discourse accomplishes is more than just the normalization of certain men as more likely to be called; instead, the calling becomes a normative organizing discourse for managing access to the figurative *religious* practitioner of church planting altogether.

Furthermore, as a central discursive element used by church planters to construct a figurative religious practitioner, the notion of the calling can be thought of as variously endorsing and denying access to an entrepreneurial identity figure for church planters. On one hand, church planter understandings of the calling as an external work qualification that must be supernaturally acquired seem to deny the aspirational, autonomous archetypical entrepreneur as a valid occupational identity figure (Essers & Benschop, 2007). Moreover, church planter discourse constructing the calling as *contra-*

individualism – such as Jack and Johnny’s suggestions that the motivation behind church planter work should not be based on personal organizing preferences – can be thought of as pushing back against the culture of enterprising individualistic achievement often related to Weber’s Protestant work ethic (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Thomas & Mueller, 2000). On the other hand, attempts to masculinize calling discourse suggest that church planters may navigate everyday occupational identity work by privileging *church planter* as existing *alongside* entrepreneur/ship in the constructed “symbolic universe of the male” (Bruni et al., 2004). The thrust of this analysis is to highlight that the calling, as an explicitly religious expression of self-knowledge at work, contributes to the haziness of *church planter* as an occupational identity by shaping a religious figurative practitioner that is *like* an entrepreneur in its masculinity, despite the idea that this religious figure is also *unlike* the entrepreneur in its accomplishment of feminine service work – which, as Saul pointed out at the beginning of Chapter Four, is “the real work church planters want to do.”

Identifying the Figurative Religious Practitioner

This chapter investigates the discursive struggle over *church planter* as an occupational identity by considering how constituents of this identity across church plant worksites wrestle with, narrate, and embody *religious* responses to the question, *who does church planter as a line of work* (Ashcraft, 2013). Specifically, this chapter shows church planters using religious discourses to construct a figurative *religious* practitioner who experiences a sense of calling, abides by a “gospel-centered” religious morality of work, and adopts community service as a work obligation. Moreover, while church

planters may talk about and enact the gospel as a racially inclusive organizing consciousness that characterizes a figurative religious practitioner who is “color-engaging”, both the discourses of calling and community service strategically divide church planter labor along gender and socioeconomic status lines.

Importantly, this chapter also begins to demonstrate how planters conduct identity work within a complex, ambiguous context of discursive enactment and resistance. Even as they attempt to make sense of their occupational identity as specifically religious, church planters grappled with notions of for-profit capitalism and the extent to which they were supposed to be enterprising or not. In this, this chapter starts to reveal that church planters employ and embody religious discourses to construct a religious occupational identity that variously and sometimes simultaneously endorses and resists enterprising occupational identities and organizing moralities, such that the figurative *religious* practitioner of church planting is *like* an economic worker, but cannot fully *be* an economic worker and retain a sense of spiritual legitimacy. I tease out these tensions further in the next chapter by foregrounding the role entrepreneur/ship comes to play within them.

Additionally, one important story that this chapter begins to tell about religious occupational identities and difference is that religious occupations that adopt an ethic of care may be thought of as aligned with social work identities and underscored as feminine *in general*. Although some church planters attempt to normalize masculinity as underpinning *church planter* via artificial constructions of the calling as masculine, women church planters who describe experiencing a calling contradict these claims.

Through a *glass slipper* lens, what we see is an unspoken acknowledgment of relational church planter service work as feminine next to outspoken claims of the calling to religious work as masculine; however, these spoken claims do not necessarily have anything to do with actually accomplishing relational church planter service tasks, such as going to meetings or planting community gardens. These observations challenge the normalization of assumptions about male bodies as naturally aligning with religious work, and reveal the constructed rather than objectified nature of *church planter* as an occupational identity (Ashcraft, 2011; McDonald, 2015).

In Chapter Six, I continue investigating the discursive struggle over *church planter* as an occupational identity by analyzing how church planters use economic discourses to construct a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner, who is characterized by hard work, education, and rugged masculinity, among other enterprising identity discourses. In this, I consider how church planter navigation of masculinity and femininity continues, as their occupational discourse constructs a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner in an attempt to distance *church planter* from the femininity of the social worker while also regulating feminine religious identities. I also argue that church planters are beholden to competing occupational figures that simultaneously interpellate the church planter's sense of occupational self, blurring distinctions between religious and entrepreneurial identity discourses, and leaving the church planter in a haze of complex, contradictory, and ultimately unresolvable occupational identity work.

CHAPTER VI
THE FIGURATIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL PRACTITIONER
OF CHURCH PLANTING

A central goal of this project is to extend the ways in which organization scholars understand how people explain and perform work and occupational identities that are more or less influenced by organizing discourses of religion and enterprise. In this, I draw from Paul du Gay's (1996) articulation of "enterprise culture" to position this project as an investigation into enterprise as a discursive "umbrella" that actively shades and intersects with religion to shape religious working experiences and selves. While du Gay's (1996) work itself does not identify the entrepreneur as an occupational identity, thinking of enterprise as *cultural* (rather than solely a function of economics) draws our attention to how the entrepreneurial notion of "being enterprising" has permeated across Western social spheres, such that noncommercial workplaces – including church plants – remain in the shadow of the umbrella of enterprise. Accordingly, by looking for discursive "moments of enterprise" (Fenwick, 2008), such as talk about taking risks or being innovative among workers who may not typically be thought of as entrepreneurs – including church planters – I aim to problematize the work identities, contexts, and communicative and embodied performances we associate with both enterprise and entrepreneur/ship, including the interdisciplinary notion that entrepreneurs are primarily identified by the (economic) value they are able to create.

Toward these ends, this chapter continues investigating the discursive struggle over *church planter* as an occupational identity by analyzing how church planters use enterprising discourses to construct a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner (Ashcraft, 2013). Specifically, I examine how church planters use “celebratory talk” (du Gay, 1996) about entrepreneur/ship to valorize and normalize an occupational prototype who is both distinct from the religious figure described in Chapter Four, and characterized by entrepreneurial identity themes, including *pioneerism*, *creativity*, *risk-taking*, *innovativeness*, and *masculinity*, among others. Indeed, for the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner, entrepreneurialism in church planter work seems to be characterized as an ordained opportunity to “be enterprising” in an effort to (re)contextualize religious organizing and achieve cultural relevance. Furthermore, this chapter draws from critical entrepreneurship studies (e.g., Ogbor, 2000) to show how church planters lean on entrepreneur/ship as an ideology of work and life that normalizes and privileges a particular view and embodied performance of the religious entrepreneur as inherently young, white, masculine, heterosexual, and morally valuable to the work of the church (Gill, 2013; McDonald, 2015).

Ultimately, this chapter argues that notions of religion are complexly entwined with other forms of difference in church planter talk about and performances of entrepreneurship, and acts as a response to my second and third research questions: How do church planters and texts about church planter identities employ religious and/or enterprising discourses to make claims about and construct a figurative practitioner? And, how do assumptions about difference intersect with and participate in the

occupational identity work of church planters, and in the creation of texts about church planter identities? The chapter is crafted around three major sections. First, I establish a tone for the chapter by showing how church planters make sense of church planting as “hard work” that can be explained like enterprising start-up work. Then, I show how church planters celebrate the entrepreneur as a “hard worker” who is characterized by pioneerism, vision, and risk-taking. Finally, I demonstrate how church planters talk about, perform, and masculinize the entrepreneur as an ideal figurative practitioner for accomplishing their “hard work”.

Church Planting is Hard Work

“It takes hard work, striving for excellence and a compelling message to stand out from all the noise and get noticed.” (Ted Ryce, quoted by K. Constable on Entrepreneur.com)

“You could have a great message or home group model, but if nobody knows you exist, what good have you done? At the same time, there’s a notion that if you run the church like a business, you’re doing something wrong.” (Braden)

These two comments about work, juxtaposed against one another, place a spotlight on the inherent tensions that church planters grapple with as they try to make sense of their occupational identities in an enterprise culture. Even as Braden echoes the entrepreneurial importance of a “compelling message” and “standing out from the noise” for his church plant, he cannot fully give himself over to these entrepreneurial objectives and retain a clear sense of moral uprightness at work. It is the way that church planters wrestle with and embody this tension that this chapter and the following conclusion of this project will focus on.

First, church planter constructions of a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner begin with storying church planting as “hard work”. This story is prevalent in network-level discourse about church planting as a work task; for example, in an Acts 29 blog post titled “5 lessons I learned from church planting”, Joshua Reich (2014) writes, “When you start a church, it is exciting. Then the hard work starts. People stop coming, someone gets angry ... and it is hard work”, and the Acts 29 website itself declares, “Planting a church is a challenging task”, before warning religious workers, “Unless you really like pain and frustration, you do not want to attempt to plant a church unless you have been equipped, gifted, and specifically called by God to do so!” Additionally, in *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission*, Darrin Patrick (2010) explains that the “unsexy reality” of church planting is that “it involves hard work – the heavy-lifting, curse-ridden, unyielding employment of your whole person for the sake of the church” (p. 94). Thus, whereas the figurative religious practitioner described in Chapter Five might resist notions of the Protestant Ethic via a sense of the calling as contra-individualism, “hard work” discourse begins to cast an entrepreneurial church-planting figure who embodies a personal ethic of undertaking difficult labor out of accountability to both God and the church.

Because church planting work tasks are storied as “hard work”, the figurative church planter is constructed as embracing a cultural lifestyle of working hard. Patrick (2010) identifies the church planter as “the recipient of a special burden and challenge to serve God’s church as a vocation” (p. 103) and someone who must “exhibit integrity in their workplace”, first and foremost by being “known as a hard worker” (p. 54).

Accordingly, church planters who participated in this study expressed “hard work” as a *desirable* work culture; Pete explained, “We *want* to work hard” (his emphasis added), and Gerry said, “For my staff, the culture is work hard ... Your job should be done when we get to Friday where the weekend is”, adding that he makes sense of his hard work through the embodied metaphor of “a long sprint”. Interestingly, Terence described church planters as having a “high calling” to hard work that grants them cultural status:

It’s really, really hard. I’d rather go be just an entrepreneur ... It’s a huge responsibility. It’s a noble thing to do, but do not do it if you don’t feel the burden of it. You got to feel called.

Terence’s emphasis here is not so much on denigrating the entrepreneur (an identity that he still ultimately deems as desirable), but instead on characterizing the church planter as made spiritually noble in the undertaking of a burdensome calling to religious organizing. What this means for the entrepreneurial figure of church planting is that failure to work hard enough is understood as failure to be appropriately spiritual.

Indeed, because church planters are supposed to do hard work, laziness in enacting the calling to church planter work is characterized as immoral and sinful. Patrick (2010) suggests, “it is a great sin” for church planters to “watch over” their congregations “with a lazy eye” (p. 80), and warns the church planter, “If you allow passivity, laziness, and sin to fester, you will soon despise the church you pastor” (p. 98). Importantly, the twin ethics of hard work as spiritual nobility and laziness as sin also come to characterize the church planter *beyond* work; for example, in an Acts 29 blog post titled “Church planting is hard work”, Scott Thomas (2011) gives church planters a list of “seven practical ways you can work hard”, instructing church planters

to work hard in their organizing work, but also in their marriages, parenting, physical health, financial health, and their “walk with Jesus”, before concluding that “a church planter that is not self-controlled and disciplined is disqualified”. Despite the seemingly paradoxical idea that a church planter must work hard *all the time* while remaining “self-controlled and disciplined”, Thomas’ post reinforces the notion that church planting is good work *because* it is hard work, and therefore not sinfully lazy.

During interviews, church planters incorporated the notion that church planting is demanding labor into their work narratives in various ways. Tom used the metaphor of the stage, saying, “You’re always on in ministry, because there’s not an 8:00 to 5:00 schedule with human interaction”, and Owen described church planting as “a great sacrifice” that is mentally, emotionally, and physically taxing:

Honestly, I believe more and more that vocational ministry comes at a cost. I’m realizing it’s a great cost ... Because I can technically not be here, but in my mind, it’s still difficult to get a lot of what’s going on with the church off my brain. Maybe it’s just me, but it’s very difficult ... So I’ve been learning a lot about self-maintenance, like how to make sure that I’m working out, that I’m eating right, drinking water – just because mentally, it can get to be a lot at times.

Thus, for Owen, the “great cost” of doing the hard work of church planting is living a life that is fully structured by church planter work, such that he must discipline his body when he is not at work to be able to withstand the rigors of being at work. Moreover, hard work discourse constructs an enterprising church planter figure who is determined and willing to tough it out in the face of the “great cost” of work; for example, Patrick (2010) asserts, “Toughness and determination are often lacking in church planters” (p. 94), and the Acts 29 website claims that a competent church planter “portrays resilience under opposition and setbacks.” Similarly, Deb told me during our interview that church

planting is “not for the faint of heart”, before going on to clarify what that means for who church planters should be:

You kind of have to be crazy – really in any circumstance, not just church planting – to just step out on a limb and say, “I’m going to build something from nothing.” I think church planting in general, if you knew all that it would entail – it might not be something that you just jump onboard with.

Here, Deb narrates a vision of an ideal church planter who is an uncommon risk-taker, simultaneously characterizing church planting as hard work that comes with many hidden challenges and is therefore not for everyone. Furthermore, as church planters use hard work discourse to construct an enterprising occupational ideal who demonstrates toughness in doing difficult labor, avoids the sin of laziness, and takes risks, they begin to point to the entrepreneur as an object of cultural comparison that gives value and meaning to their work. Saul described how entrepreneurialism intersects with hard work discourse to influence church planter identities:

There’s so many obstacles to church planting, to starting anything new. And the ability to recognize those obstacles from far enough away to respond to them in a way that effectively helps the organization to move forward, I would say, is one of those key components of an entrepreneurial approach to life that has been reflected in a church planter as well.

Importantly, Saul describes the solution to overcoming obstacles at work as adopting an “entrepreneurial approach to life”; in other words, the figurative entrepreneurial church planter is not just enterprising at work, but enterprising *all the time*. Thus, as church planters story their work as hard work that comes with risks, obstacles, mental exhaustion, and intrusions upon their private lives, their identity work begins to lean upon entrepreneurialism as they struggle to create notions of self that are culturally valuable and spiritually noble at and beyond work. In the next section, I explain how

hard work discourse also tends to entrepreneurialize how church planters tell stories about the organizing patterns their work creates.

Church Planting is (Like) Startup Work

According to Eric Ries, a startup is “an organization dedicated to creating something new under conditions of extreme uncertainty.” Sounds a lot like a church plant. (Parsons, “5 business books for church planters,” 2015)

Just as church planters echo the Protestant Ethic in their constructions of a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who works hard, they also echo innovation as an organizing norm in their stories about their church plants. Specifically, innovation emerges as a theme in church planter discourse that follows connections between the church planter and the entrepreneur by drawing similar connections between church plants and startup organizations. In the blog post quoted above, Nick Parsons, who recruits church planters for the Orchard Group church planter network, goes on to describe *The Lean Startup* as “about what makes a startup successful” and “a model for creating organizations” that is “especially helpful ... for accomplishing the mission of your church plant.” Thus, the “startup” is positively valenced as a “good” pattern of thinking about and accomplishing church plant organizing.

Church planters in this study also used the startup as a sensemaking reference point for describing the organizing outcomes of their hard work. Deb explained, “in many ways, a church plant functions like a startup business”, and described how that means church planters have to think like entrepreneurs:

In reality, it is a business – not a business venture, but it has to operate like a business in several different ways. So, just like a startup, there are so many different components and aspects, and things that have to be prioritized over other things, and different layers of building something from the ground up,

which is what you're doing with church planting ... But we still have to think through organizationally how we're going to build those things. If we didn't think of the entrepreneurial side of it and the business side of the church, we wouldn't be able to accomplish what we want to ministry-wise.

Interestingly, Deb seems to wrestle with whether a church plant *is* a business, or is *like* a business, before settling on the notion of the startup as a lens through which to make sense of the “entrepreneurial side” of church planting work. Moreover, Deb points to entrepreneurialism as a *prerequisite* for accomplishing spiritual ministry work; in this way, church planters seem to understand the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner as accomplishing religion by performing entrepreneurship.

In this vein, other church planters in this study told multiple stories about giving church plants the cultural meaning and image of dot com startups when describing their work to people in their communities. Kason told me that saying he works at a church plant “totally loses people” such that they “don’t even want to talk anymore”; instead, Kason explained, “one of the ways that I’ve described the church plant is, it’s like a church startup. In a big city, there’s a lot of people that know what startup means, and so that’s really helpful in our culture.” Kason suggests that because *church planter* is a relatively unknown occupation, *church plant* is likely to lack cultural or organizational meaning *without entrepreneurialism*; thus, he looks to the organizing context of the “big city”, where startups are likely to be prevalent, and uses startup discourse to give his work and organizing meaning in that context. Similarly, Jack explained that when people ask him what a church plant is, he draws comparisons to startup businesses because they are culturally familiar:

I say, are you familiar with a startup business? You heard about these startups everywhere, it's all over the news? It's that, but the church. We're not out to make a ton of money like a startup is, but you start with a big dream. You start with a vision. You start with a small group of people and you're out there trying to get people to join you in what you're doing. Now, you're not selling a product, and it's not for a profit, but you're selling them a good just in the same way that a startup company is.

Like Deb, who wrestled with whether a church plant *is* or is *like* a business, Jack seems to wrestle with the notion of “selling”; in the same sentence, he suggests that church planters *are* and *are not* selling a product. Additionally, during a shadowing session, Braden told me a story that echoes some of the tensions and ambiguities of Jack and Deb's descriptions:

To people who don't really know what church planting is, like people that are maybe outside the church spectrum – so, I got a buddy that owns a business and I was trying to explain church planting to him, because he's Catholic. I said, it's a lot like you starting your own business. I'm just starting my own church.

The irony in Braden's story is noticeable and meaningful; since his “buddy” is Catholic, Braden is not describing the church plant like a startup to someone “outside the church spectrum”. Thus, as church planters wrestle with making sense of their occupational identities and the work those identities entail, startup discourse acts as an enterprising trope that paints a conflicted vision of the church plant, planter, and planting as appealing to economic meanings across religious and cultural contexts. Taken together, this section demonstrates that notions of enterprise and entrepreneurship – including the nobility of hard work, the sinfulness of laziness, the heroism of risk-taking, and startup culture – act as powerful discursive source material for church planter constructions of a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner, even as church plant workers themselves are uncertain about what their occupational identity should mean. In the next section, I show

how, along with characterizing church planting as hard work that is like startup business work, church planters celebrate and valorize entrepreneurs as ideal workers.

Celebrating the Entrepreneur as an Occupational Hero

During my interviews with church planters, I asked them how they would define an entrepreneur in order to further understand how they might access, endorse, or resist an enterprising occupational identity. In this section, I draw a brief sketch of “celebratory talk” about entrepreneurs in response to that question, with the intention of creating a set of thematic baselines that will guide the following discussion, regarding how church planters construct and embody a figurative practitioner who *should be* like an entrepreneur in order to remedy “hard work”, and who has less meaning and practical capability to tackle “hard work” without entrepreneur/ship. Here, however, I first discuss how church planters “celebrate” the entrepreneur through a functionalist framework, where one is either an entrepreneur or not, and the entrepreneur is seen as a positive economic and cultural identity object characterized by *pioneerism*, *vision*, *risk-taking*, and *popularity*.

Entrepreneurs are innovative pioneers. First, church planters celebrated the entrepreneur as passionate and motivated by a “pioneer spirit”. Scarlett defined the entrepreneur as “driven and motivated and passionate about whatever product or whatever service you’re providing”, and Kason said that he thinks of the entrepreneur as “like a pioneer” before drawing a historical comparison to the European colonization of the Americas:

It wasn’t like there’s this thing here, and they copy and pasted it over here, because it wasn’t there before. It’s a whole new kind of something. The pioneers

literally went to where European people hadn't gone before. So I feel like there's that piece ... that "pioneerness" is like a lot of entrepreneurs.

This description of the entrepreneur as a pioneer both celebrates innovation as typically entrepreneurial, and demonstrates a lack of critical awareness regarding the cultural displacement implicated by Kason's metaphor. However, Kason also recognized entrepreneurs as successful because they are supposed to be innovative:

They're successful because they bring to the market something that was never there before, like Airbnb. That's successful because no one had thought of doing that before. If they had, they didn't capitalize on it. Those guys did, so they're really successful ... So I think that's what entrepreneurs do. They innovate, they do stuff that hasn't been done before, and they do stuff that has been done before – but they do it better.

Here, Kason constructs a vision of an entrepreneur who is naturally successful because innovation is thought of as a naturally valuable and "good" work process and outcome. Other church planters also recognized innovation and pioneerism as positive or helpful features of the entrepreneur; Saul identified entrepreneurs as "somebody who is using a new business venture to respond to a recognized felt need", and Gerry constructed the entrepreneur as specifically masculine in his pioneerism: "It's a guy who is self-motivated, he's a mobilizer of people, he has a pioneer spirit, he can build things from the ground up, take charge of the hill guy, he can raise money, he's good talking with people, a visionary." Importantly, both Kason and Gerry locate the entrepreneur in the "symbolic universe of the male" (Bruni et al., 2004), thereby normalizing the notion that pioneerism and innovation are occupational identity features that can and should be accessed by certain kinds of male workers. While entrepreneurship scholars have demonstrated that women can access and be empowered by these discourses (e.g., Gill &

Ganesh, 2007), this chapter will argue that church planters navigate occupational identity tensions in part by privileging the cultural value of the American entrepreneur, and in turn, by professionalizing entrepreneurial masculinity and disadvantaging feminine identities, including *wife* and *mother*.

Entrepreneurs are creative visionaries. Secondly, church planters celebrated the entrepreneur as “someone with a vision that sees it to fruition” (Terence). Braden explained, “I think an entrepreneur is a starter, somebody that has a vision, somebody that has a dream, somebody who is kind of on their own at some level that wants to go out and start their course”, adding that entrepreneurial visions can include “business or social work or church work.” Similarly, Tom described the entrepreneur as “somebody who has a clear vision for what they’re supposed to do with their time, and they are the ones that are taking that vision and materializing it into something that people can participate in that accomplishes some goal.” Interestingly, not all church planters understood the creative visionary entrepreneur to be a sort of “lone ranger”; Jack agreed with Braden that an entrepreneur “has a dream”, but clarified that he thinks entrepreneurs “try to articulate that dream in a way that captures people’s attention and gets people to come on board with what they’re doing.” In another point of distinction, Deb did not think of entrepreneurs as having visions that apply beyond economic contexts, saying, “I think an entrepreneur is somebody that has an idea, and believes in their idea, and believes that it’s something they can leverage to make money.” Ultimately, however, church planters valorized the entrepreneur as goal-oriented, self-sufficient, and efficient with their use of work time in order to capitalize on their visions

and dreams.

Church planters also characterized the visionary entrepreneur as a creator figure, specifically through the discourse of “building” upon a particular organizing vision. Tom identified the entrepreneur as “building organizations and inviting people in and setting up structures that make it valuable”, and Teresa described entrepreneurial work as “building something from scratch. They are building systems, they are building a staff, they are building a brand. Everything is from the ground up.” Within this discourse, church planters thought of entrepreneurs as capable of creative building by securing “funding, backing, partnerships, resources, and people to buy into that vision, and then they jump onboard with the team, and then it moves the vision forward” (Tom). Importantly, both Tom and Teresa make sense of the creative entrepreneur as an economic figure, who first and foremost builds “valuable” structures, creates brands, and secures funding.

Like pioneerism discourse, church planters also masculinize vision discourse in more or less conscious ways. For example, Mark described the entrepreneur as someone who “sees something that isn’t there yet” and “brings people around *him* that can help *him* do this” (emphasis added). Along these lines, Jack mentioned that he spends time “learning how to be a leader and how to hold fast to a vision” by reading biographies of “historical figures that were great leaders” with “a bigger vision of what they wanted their life to mean” – namely, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Thomas Jefferson, each of them white men. This more or less subtle gendering of vision as an entrepreneurial attribute further contributes to the normalization of the entrepreneur as a

celebrated masculine occupational figure.

Entrepreneurs take risks and accept responsibility. Thirdly, church planters celebrated the entrepreneur as a daring risk-taker who “is willing to take shots” (Tony), willfully handles ambiguity at work, and accepts responsibility for doing good work. Sean explained, “the number one thing is an entrepreneur – they are risk-taking and live on the edge”, and Tony suggested that entrepreneurs are naturally motivated by a willful desire to take risks:

They want to go start their own thing, and so they feel that desire, they have that aspiration, and they’re willing to take the risk ... And they’re willing to step into all the mess that starting something new entails.

Tony’s narrative constructs a vision of an entrepreneur who possesses a keen awareness of the “messiness” of innovation, plus a heroic willingness to move forward in the face of uncertainty. In this vein, church planters also characterized entrepreneurs as bold in the face of “a lot of ambiguity around tasks”, such that “entrepreneurs, they just want to dig in and say, I don’t need all of these things to be answered before I dive in, let’s just figure it out” (Tony). Furthermore, not only do church planters make sense of the entrepreneur as having a high degree of tolerance for ambiguity at work, but also entrepreneurs are seen as responsibly making good work and life choices despite such ambiguity. Craig said, “I think a good entrepreneur or successful people do the right things. They just do”, and Jenn suggested that entrepreneurs are called “even in business” to “excel and become the best of who we are.” Thus, along with being innovative pioneers and creative visionaries, entrepreneurs are understood by church planters to be willing risk-takers who naturally “do the right things” at work.

Entrepreneurs are popular and cool. Finally, church planters celebrate and valorize the entrepreneur as an occupational ideal by storying entrepreneur/ship as culturally popular and cool. Owen explained that the entrepreneur is “part of our culture” because “people like what’s new. It’s more fun, the new thing”; and Johnny opined, “it is cool to be a part of something that is new and fresh and young.” Kason clearly stated, “Entrepreneurship is popular”, before describing how the cultural popularity of the entrepreneur influences contemporary religious organizing like church planting:

I don’t think the Christian community is totally cut off from the rest of the culture. I think there’s this Venn diagram-like blend of the two. I wouldn’t say that guys who are doing church planting don’t listen to business podcasts who are talking about entrepreneurship, and don’t listen to these gurus and those guys. I think they do it critically and thoughtfully. They’re those same influences that are influencing other people to major in entrepreneurship in college. They’re influencing everybody.

This commentary about the popularity of entrepreneur/ship suggests that church planters understand the entrepreneur to be an economically and culturally powerful occupational identity. Indeed, since Kason suggests that it is the “gurus” of entrepreneur/ship (rather than those of Christianity) who are currently “influencing everybody”, it seems that church planters understand the entrepreneur to be an occupational figure who offers wider cultural influence than the figurative religious practitioner on its own.

This section sketched a vision for how church planters use celebratory talk to normalize the entrepreneur as a positive economic and cultural identity characterized by *pioneerism*, *vision*, *risk-taking*, and *popularity*. Taken together with the first section, wherein church planters storied their work as “hard work” that resembles startup work, this section further clarifies how church planters understand *entrepreneur* as a

socioculturally pervasive occupational identity that permeates and blurs distinctions between public and private ways of knowing work and the working self. In the next section, I discuss how church planters navigate entrepreneur/ship *as church planters* and attempt to embody a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner who is marked by a pioneer spirit, a creative vision, and risk-taking, as well as hegemonic masculinity norms.

“The Blueprint”: Church Planters Should Be Like Entrepreneurs

In this section, I draw from my interviews and ethnographic experiences with church planters, as well as books and network-level discourse, to show how church planter stories about “hard work” and “celebratory talk” about the entrepreneur results in the discursive construction of a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who church plant workers *should* be like. In this, I demonstrate that under the umbrella of enterprise, entrepreneurialism for the church planter is a consequence of a convoluted mix of occupational identity representations that includes both supernatural calling and secular influence. Moreover, I show how church planters organize and access a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner through entwined religious and secular assumptions about masculinity at work and at home.

According to an Acts 29 blog post titled “The kind of men we want on our team” (Adair, 2014), the “blueprint” for church planters is “unconventional” because it calls for “humble entrepreneurs” who are “hard workers who prioritize their families.” By this blueprint, church planters are left with quite an occupational identity paradox; that is, they *must* be entrepreneurs (because entrepreneurs work hard), and they *must not* be entrepreneurs (because entrepreneurs are self-interested and, according to the implied

stereotype, typically do not prioritize “family work” due to their masculine breadwinning responsibilities). Indeed, this “blueprint” also reveals its masculine underpinnings by intentionally directing its commentary about family priorities toward men, and by suggesting that church planters should not necessarily prioritize their families because they are “in touch” with femininity, but instead because they are appropriately masculine; that is, because women are already assumed to prioritize family and would not need to be reminded to do so, the appropriately masculine church planter is willing to expand his masculine responsibilities to include family work. Thus, church planter discourse normalizes “hard work” and “family work” as the professional domain of men.

Moreover, church planters also wrestle with apparently competing notions of intersections between entrepreneurship and the calling to religious work. Johnny told me that “there are many entrepreneurial things God calls me into”, adding, “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that. I don’t think God finds fault in the fact that he’s given that as a gift to many people”; and yet, on the other hand, the Acts 29 website states, “while entrepreneurial micro-skills should aid to confirm a calling to plant a church, *they do not constitute one*” (emphasis added). Thus, church planters seem to understand the entrepreneur as intersecting with religion to legitimize or deny the calling, despite the supposed availability of the calling to everyone. In the remainder of this section, I continue to explore how church planters experience, express, and embody these occupational identity tensions as they construct a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner. The structure of this section mirrors the previous one, such that I consider how church

planters attempt to align their occupational identities with entrepreneurial assumptions of *pioneerism, creative vision, risk-taking, and popularity*, as well as *masculinity and heteronormativity*.

What is a church planter? The way we use it, it's someone who is like an entrepreneur – a pioneer. (Kason)

Church planters should be innovative pioneers. As Kason's above quote begins to demonstrate, one primary discursive move used by church planters to construct a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner is the naturalization of a particular vision of an entrepreneur who is an innovative, passionate, and driven pioneer. Using this discursive lens, Gerry said that a church planter should be an "entrepreneurial, highly driven person" who is "naturally competitive", and Craig explained, "I think a church planter has got to be entrepreneurial by nature. You've got to have a pioneer spirit ... That is the right make-up for this." Thus, church planters construct the pioneering entrepreneur as a naturally occurring spiritual object possessed by the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner; indeed, it is interesting that the "right make-up" for church planting is not first marked by religiosity, but instead by entrepreneurialism.

Within this discourse, the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner of church planting also comes to be aligned with economic figures who are seen to also be pioneering. For example, an Orchard Group blog post (Kruckenberg, "5 suggestions when hiring staff," 2015) states:

Steve Jobs was often was accused of thinking he could "bend reality," meaning he had a way of insisting something could be done that others said could not. This is a both a big asset and massive weakness. Church planters, being driven entrepreneurs, often have this same tendency.

Here, the ideal enterprising church planter is discursively aligned as sharing entrepreneurial tendencies with Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple. This cultural allegory for the occupational identity of church planters is at once telling and ironic, given that Gerry used Steve Jobs as a point of contrast with church planter service work and relational care in Chapter Five (e.g., “Nobody’s looking at Steve Jobs for counseling”), and that Steve Jobs is widely valorized as a hard-working entrepreneurial paragon despite the fact that he presided over a massive institution that culturally and economically does not resemble the “startup culture” to which church planters claim their work belongs. Nevertheless, the notion that church planters should be strong-willed, persistent pioneers is a common refrain:

As the entrepreneurs of the church world, we church planters tend to have strong opinions on the kind of church we want. So once we get the idea of the future church in our heads, we go after it. We raise money, find the venues, and organize the team to get the goal that (we hope) was given to us by God. (Mabry, “Four questions about your church plant,” 2015)

In this description, not only are church planters characterized as driven to “go after” their “idea of the future church”, and to do so in economically enterprising ways, but they are described as “*the entrepreneurs of the church world*” – a claim that suggests that other religious workers who are *not* church planters are also *not* entrepreneurs.

The notion that only ideal church planters naturally have the “pioneer spirit” necessary to be an “entrepreneur of the church world” also emerges in church planter talk about learning from failure and mistakes. One Orchard Group blog post suggests that church planters “should be innovative and free to challenge and fail, reevaluate and try” (Hickerson, “5 values that shape our staff & volunteer culture,” 2015); similarly,

Jenn explained that if church planters are “not a person who has an entrepreneurial spirit”, they “wouldn’t have the right amount of passion” to be a “great leader” who “can learn from mistakes.” Thus, freedom to fail and to try again during religious work is characterized as a consequence of, and perhaps even a privilege earned by being an entrepreneurial pioneer; and, since church planters are “the entrepreneurs of the church world”, the implication is that the ideal church planter does not fear failure at work.

Craig spoke directly to this implication:

If you don’t have an entrepreneurial mindset going into it, why start it? I mean, because entrepreneurs tend to see what other people don’t see, and relish the opportunity to pioneer and create, and are not afraid of failure. I think a typical church staff guy probably gets the job, and at some point, they’re doing what they have to do so they don’t lose their job. I think a typical entrepreneur in general doesn’t have a lot of fear of failure, or their fear of failure drives them to make sure they’re successful, right? So, they just got a little bit different motor, and failure is not an option. It’s just – burn the ships. I’m here. I can’t go back. That’s kind of how I felt when we started.

In Craig’s description, not only is the ideal church planter like an entrepreneur who is not afraid of failure, but also the ideal church planter is *not like* a “typical church staff guy”, who is thought to be afraid of failure at work. Moreover, Craig implies that a church plant started by a “typical church staff guy” would be a waste of time, once again reinforcing the notion that only religious workers who are able to align with an innovative and pioneering figurative entrepreneurial practitioner should do church planter work.

Interestingly, church planters did wrestle with the extent to which their figurative entrepreneurial practitioner is an innovative pioneer. On one hand, some church planters made sense of innovation as a God-like quality:

God is an entrepreneur. He created everything, and he makes people new, so it's like entrepreneurs – why do you think they start new stuff? Because they have the image of God. It's wired into people to do entrepreneurship. (Kason)

Kason evokes Sørensen's (2008) characterization of the entrepreneur as creative savior by suggesting that acts of creation and starting "new stuff" qualities that the entrepreneur naturally shares with God. Moreover, by identifying God as masculine before suggesting that entrepreneurs "have the image of God", Kason also normalizes masculinity as a religious quality of the ideal church planter.

On the other hand, however, some church planters questioned the notion that church planters are innovators to a God-like degree. For example, Saul said that "a church planter is more like a franchisee", because "to be a church planter requires some of the same skills as being an entrepreneur, but you're not talking about carving out a new business that hasn't existed before." Instead, Saul clarified that he thinks of church planter work as "opening a new McDonalds that still serves the same menu as hopefully every other McDonalds does." During my observations at church plants, I noticed practices that evoked both the brand distinction of Apple and the franchising operation of McDonalds; for example, while each church plant employed its own unique logo and color scheme, they also each featured nearly identical Sunday service patterns, sang some of the same songs, staged their meeting spaces in similar ways, and met in similar locations (e.g., both Smyrna Church and Sardis Church met in elementary school cafeterias). However, despite Saul's discursive contention with the notion of the church planter as innovative pioneer, he still claims that being a church planter *requires* entrepreneurial skills; thus, the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner is still seen as

holding mandatory influence over the occupational identities of church planters. In the next section, I analyze how church planters expand the influence of the entrepreneur as an occupational ideal through the discourse of “vision”.

Church planters should be creative visionaries. A second point of discursive alignment that church planters draw between entrepreneurs and the ideal church planter is the notion that church planters should also be creative visionaries. Craig described the ideal church planter as “someone that feels like they have a particular life vision that they long for a group of people to embrace”, and Owen explained that people who plant churches “are ambitious, they’re starters, and they have a God-given vision.” As Owen’s description suggests, church planters constructed a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner whose vision for organizing intersects with a sense of supernatural calling. Other participants explained that a church planter is someone who “feels the call of God on their life to plant a church and come up with a vision for a new church” (Jack), or who has “a specific vision and a specific calling to do something, and feels like that calling plays out best in the context of doing something new” (Tony). In other words, the ideal church planter must be able to simultaneously access a religious ideal who is called, and an enterprising ideal who has an entrepreneurial “vision” for organizing.

Church planters also utilize vision discourse to construct a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who is active, energetic, and persuasive. Patrick (2010) writes that to be a church planter, “you have to be able to lead – to cast vision, to create energy, to motivate, to inspire, and to build systems” (p. 67). Similarly, Owen said that for church planters who have a truly entrepreneurial vision, “it’s hard to just stay in an

office for eight hours a day. You have to be moving around.” Additionally, Owen clarified that church planters have to be “able to really inspire people to their vision”; Saul agreed, stating, “A church planter has got to be somebody who not only has a compelling vision, but is able to communicate that compelling vision.” Practically, what this means for church planters is pressure to *seem* inspirational; thus, the production elements that I observed across church plants, including live bands, colorful lights, and demonstrative sermons, are all likely manifestations of the notion that a church planter who is not energetic and inspiring is unlikely to have an entrepreneurial vision people will buy into.

Accordingly, church planters also linked having an entrepreneurial vision to success and failure at work. Craig explained, “There are probably a lot of factors why churches don’t make it, but all in all, you probably got a vision problem”, and Teresa clarified, “You have to have your people buy into the vision of what you’re doing so that they can be committed to do it too, or it’s not going to work.” Similarly, Braden said that successful church planter work “takes a good vision”, adding, “If you don’t have a good vision, people aren’t going to follow. There’s a verse from the Bible that says without vision the people perish. People like to get behind a vision.” The notion that a “good vision” should induce increasing amounts of economic exchange – that is, getting people to “buy in” – seems to contradict the religious figure of Chapter Five, for whom success is not supposed to be measured by numerical growth or accumulation.

Church planters also expressed feeling pressure to constantly make sure their work supports and promotes an entrepreneurial vision. Tony described how day-to-day

work tasks should accomplish the vision:

You have to know who you are and what you want to be. So for us, we have a vision for the church. We have kind of a mission statement to accomplish that vision. And then out of that, we have values of what we want to be ... In what you get done during your week and what you don't, it should be obvious that you prioritize that vision.

However, not all church planters expressed feeling like their work fits this ideal, where all work tasks promote an enterprising vision all the time. Deb, who described her work as interacting with community members throughout the week, said, "There's a lot of times where I don't necessarily feel like my work contributes to the vision", and Kason explained that he sees his role as being in the "background ... setting up a stage for the vision to be cast", rather than actually communicating that vision himself. In this vein, an Acts 29 blog post titled "Maybe you shouldn't plant a church" states, "Maybe you just don't have the visionizing and entrepreneurial aptitude to start a church from scratch. If that's the case, you need to have the humility to admit it" (Thune, 2010). Thus, church plant workers like Deb and Kason are left to question whether or not they should actually be church planters – a question that is especially problematic for Deb, whose identity as a woman may already cause her to be seen as less likely to fit with a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner. In Chapter Five, we saw some evidence that Deb actually does question her fit with the ideal church planter; after she told me, "I would say I'm a church planter", she immediately hedged on that statement by adding, "That feels silly to say". Beyond this, it is interesting to note that while Deb says that *she* would call herself a church planter, she does not mention whether anyone else would call her this; compared to Tony's earlier high-certainty statement that church planters "have

to know who you are and what you want to be”, we might infer that because Deb is unsure about her fit with *church planter* as an occupational identity, she is also made to feel unsure about the value of her work.

Finally, within vision discourse, church planters also constructed a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who aligns with the entrepreneur as a creative “builder”. For example, Johnny described the church planter who has a vision as “someone that could be successful starting from the ground level and building a church.” Owen described his work as “a lot of building things from the ground up and trying new things”, and Gerry explained that church planter work means, “Everything you’re building is foundational.” However, church planters wrestled with how to think about *what* they were building; while Teresa defined the church planter as a “relationship builder”, Tom thought of church planters as building organizational structures:

You are organizing a group of people towards a common goal from ground zero. And every aspect of the organizational structure you’re building from ground zero – from bank accounts to communication strategies, accounting, revenue streams and measuring of those, and then trusting God to provide them, and trying to figure out the best way to invite folks into that ... There is a vision cast that people either buy into and want to jump on board with or not.

While Tom conceived of enacting a vision by building stable structures from “ground zero”, other church planters viewed their creative “building” through less corporate lenses. Pete, for example, described church planting with the familiar trope, “taking off in a plane that you’re still building”, adding, “I think that we’ve found that to be true.” Tony leaned on this same metaphor, suggesting that a church planter vision acts like “the framework for a plane”, and the enterprising church planter should “more or less build that thing as it’s taking off.” The plane metaphor seems to intentionally evoke cultural

images of the entrepreneur as an economic hero who overcomes risky circumstances to be successful.

This section demonstrates that a discursive emphasis on having a vision contributes to the construction of an occupational figure who is supposed to align with a particular image of the entrepreneur as a successful and motivational creative visionary. For church planters, this enterprising occupational figure can be problematic when it appears to contradict the figurative religious practitioner by emphasizing a growing number of people “buying into the vision” as a measure of success. Moreover, it can leave church planters in a state of occupational identity confusion when they perceive that their daily work does not directly contribute to the accomplishment of an organizing vision. Next, I investigate how church planters construct a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who must paradoxically take enterprising risks while simultaneously being a responsible worker.

Church planters should take risks and accept responsibility. Like their celebrations of the entrepreneur as an ideal occupational identity, church planters also discursively constructed a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who must paradoxically balance being a “natural” risk-taker with being intrinsically responsible for excellence at work. Tony explained, “most church planters have an entrepreneurial spirit”, which he defined as “a personality trait” of being “willing to take some risks and go start something new”, adding, “you have that or you don’t ... that’s an entrepreneur *and* that’s a church planter” (Tony’s emphasis added). When comparing the work of church planters and entrepreneurs, Pete suggested, “Both are high-level risk. Both of them are

adventures. There's just a high failure rate, and so both can be really very tough on families and both require you to do a lot of creating." Thus, the ideal enterprising church planter is expected to be both naturally inclined toward taking risks, and to see taking risks as adventurous, despite the notion that risks could create difficult situations for church planter families.

Indeed, church planter discourse generally characterizes risk-taking as a *positive* part of the identity and work of church planters. Jenn, who stated, "Everything about this was a risk" when I asked her what challenges she faces at work, clarified why risk-taking is necessary for church planters:

Even in church, we have to take risks, which sometimes I think churches are afraid to do. There is a certain amount of risk that you have to take so that you can grow and learn, because I don't think it's healthy for any organization to become stagnant ... It's a risk, but it's a calculated risk, just like a corporation. I keep going back to that because organizations are organizations. There is very little difference until you get to the spiritual side of this.

First, Jenn characterizes risk-taking not only as positive, but also as a *healthy* part of church planter work. In this sense, the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner becomes important for church planters to accomplish because their occupational lives depend on it. Secondly, Jenn's comment that church planters should be rational, "calculated" risk-takers seems to contradict the very notion that church planters are spiritual caretakers or guides. Moreover, in her claim that "organizations are organizations", Jenn also implicates gender norms by articulating a sense of masculine managerialism on the "corporate side", seemingly pitted against feminine caretaking on the "spiritual side" of church planter risk-taking – and, in this case, Jenn suggests that a "healthy organization" takes the corporate side of risk-taking seriously in order to "grow and learn", while only

making enough room to acknowledge that there is a spiritual side. Braden seemed to wrestle with similar tensions, confusingly weaving together enterprising risk with gospel evangelism discourse:

A church planter is an entrepreneur, a risk-taker, but also somebody who loves the church, and loves the mission of the church and is an evangelist and kind of wants to spread the gospel – or the brand, if you will.

It is almost as if, in this moment, the figurative religious and entrepreneurial practitioners of church planting are pushing on Braden's commentary in opposite directions, as he first identifies the church planter as an entrepreneurial risk-taker before moving back into religious language – only to switch back to enterprise at the last moment by referring to the “gospel” as “the brand”.

This oppositional identity tension also emerged as church planters tried to juggle discourses of risk and responsibility when thinking of the ideal entrepreneurial church planter. Scarlett explained, “As much as we don't want to think of the church as a corporate job, there's a lot of the same typical responsibility. It's still a place of work.” Competing notions of the church planter as both entrepreneurial risk-taker and responsible corporate citizen also influenced how church planters made sense of their responsibility for success or failure. For instance, Tom highlighted church planters as responsible for church plant failure, explaining that such failure happens when church planters “flame out” because they have “a lot of passion, but not a lot of self-control, or discipline, or accountability.” Craig gave a more conflicted account regarding who is responsible for the success or failure of his church plant:

It's a very healthy weighty feeling that, man, I'm responsible for this thing. The success or failure – I know it's bigger than just me. I mean, God ultimately is the

one that superintends it. But from a leadership perspective, I'm the bottom line. So goes me, so goes the church.

Here, Craig echoes Braden's earlier discursive tension between the religious and entrepreneurial figurative practitioners. From a spiritual perspective, Craig describes God as the arbiter of his work outcomes; but, from a secular leadership perspective, Craig claims this role for himself.

Economically-charged responsibility discourse was also present in network-level discourse; in these texts, church planters should both "take responsibility for the direction of the church" (Patrick, 2010, p. 73) and "create ownership" within church plant memberships by "helping people to buy in and feel responsible for the growth and success of the church" (Thomas, 2007, *The Planter's Ultimatum*). In other words, the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner is responsible for taking risks that help the church grow, *and* responsible for helping church members feel responsible for taking those same risks; that is to say, the enterprising church planter should be influencing church members to become religious entrepreneurs themselves.

A final discursive theme that serves to further naturalize risk and responsibility as features of the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner is excellence. According to du Gay (1996), enterprise organizes notions of the self at work by positioning excellence as a standard mode of occupational identity expression. In this, du Gay (1996) said that individual identities come to be patterned according to work goals, such that individual circumstances are viewed as irrelevant to achieving occupational excellence. Similarly, network-level church planter identity discourse contributes to the construction of an ideal church planter who seems to naturally take personal responsibility for excellence at

work. For example, one Acts 29 blog post suggests that a church planter must be “intrinsically motivated, having a desire to do well and a commitment to excellence” (Thomas, “The planter’s ultimatum,” 2007); another of these posts instructs church planters, “When you work, *work hard with excellence*” (emphasis added), and follows up this instruction with three contradictory statements about what “working hard with excellence” might look like for the church planter: “Continue to make improvements to what you’re doing. Do what you can, with what you have. Go with what you know until you know differently, then do better” (Sinnott, “An encouragement to church planters,” 2014). Beyond the fact that each of these three pieces of “advice” seem to contradict each of the others, they also each imply that church planters should constantly pursue an apparently moving standard of excellence at work – no matter what their circumstances give them to work with.

Interestingly, church planter discourse suggests that although individual circumstances might be irrelevant to the pursuit of excellence at work, religion intersects with excellence to cast *supernatural* circumstances as relevant to occupational excellence. During interviews, church planters said that “God has a high standard and he wants us to use entrepreneurship” in order to do “work that needs to be up to par with what God wants it to be” (Johnny), and that church planter work “has to get to a certain standard ... and if you don’t get there, it’s bad” (Terence). Moreover, meeting supernatural standards requires church planters to “be creative” (Terence) and “value excellence” (Pete). In this sense, excellence becomes more than a standard identity expression; as Terence clarified, it becomes part of what church planters believe about

their relationship with God: “I just believe that God has called me to do things in excellence.” Thus, for church planters, to be called to entrepreneurialism means to be called to excellence, such that excellence at work requires that work tasks be aligned with the calling; and, a failure to be personally excellent at work suggests a failure to be called. Next, I take a brief look at the way that church planters normalize notions of risk, responsibility, and entrepreneurialism in their day-to-day acceptance of particular secular meanings for being an excellent worker.

“Good to Great” and making sense of excellence. Practically, one way that assumptions about taking responsibility for excellence play out in the daily work lives of church planters is through the consumption of secular influences that seem to confirm excellence as an identity of value across sociocultural and economic spheres. One of these influences that surfaced repeatedly in this study was Jim Collins’ (2001) popular corporate strategy book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t*, which claims, “Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice” (p. 11). Across network-level discourse, interviews, observations, and shadowing, *Good to Great* was present, and described as positive, helpful, and even necessary reading for the enterprising church planter. For example, Patrick (2010) writes:

There is little doubt that in order to lead a church well in the twenty-first century, one must read current authors from the realm of the church and from the realm of business ... We can glean principles from the business world – all truth is God’s truth (p. 60).

In that same passage, Patrick goes on to recommend *Good to Great* as a “must read” for church planters. When I asked about influential books or authors during interviews, Tom

referenced *Good to Great*, saying that he is “subconsciously still pulling from that book about leadership ... and about authority versus responsibility”, adding “I think there are some of those things that apply to all leadership teams.” Craig also pointed to *Good to Great* as “great reference material” for church planters to learn “the key factors in building a sustainable organization that outperforms all the other organizations”; and Pete said he found *Good to Great* helpful because “great ideas don’t just come from Christians and from church planters.” When I asked Mark why *Good to Great* was so popular with church planters, he clarified:

Christianity has always been okay with taking the best thinking of the world, because the best thinking of the world is how God designed the world ... If Jim Collins has a good way for Western culture to hire people, okay. If it’s not against some Christian tenet, then we’re in. The people on the bus? That’s very entrepreneurial, and it’s very much a church planting thing. Find the right people, get them on board, and then figure out exactly how to utilize everybody.

Good to Great maintained a physical presence in this study as well; when I finished interviews and began shadowing Braden, I entered his office, sat down in his guest chair, glanced at his bookshelf – and there, nestled among copies of the Bible and theology texts, was a bright red hardback copy of *Good to Great*. The reason I briefly focus on the manifest presence of *Good to Great* in this study is twofold. First, by unquestioningly adopting a discursive resource that first and foremost values outperforming other organizations, church planters construct a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who contradicts and competes with their religious figure, who supposedly values organizational partnerships for the good of community members. Secondly, by describing *Good to Great* as “the best thinking of the world” and “God’s truth”, church planters construct a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who not only strongly aligns

with classed assumptions of the entrepreneur as a creative, professional, and wealthy (white) bootstrapper (Gill, 2014), but who also would be religiously immoral *not* to align with those assumptions. In other words, *Good to Great* discourse classes *church planter* as an occupational identity, and clearly marks those who do not fit its specific vision of the entrepreneur as the “wrong people” who are unlikely to be excellent and therefore should “get off the bus” of church planter work. In the next section, I expand upon these critiques of church planter constructions of a classed and gendered figurative entrepreneurial practitioner.

Church planters should be popular, cool, and masculine. Church planters also discursively construct a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who aligns with images of the entrepreneur as a culturally popular and cool occupational identity symbol. Moreover, church planter discourse partially accomplishes this by spotlighting certain male church planters as embodied “celebrities” or “icons” of church planting as an occupation, thereby requiring other church plant workers who may “fit” this popular vision to enact contextual performances of enterprising masculine symbolism, and othering church plant workers who are unable to negotiate such performances (Ashcraft, 2013). Specifically, the cool figurative entrepreneurial practitioner of church planting is constructed as best embodied by young, white, heterosexual men.

Church planter constructions of a cool entrepreneurial ideal begin with assumptions about valued work identities in contemporary culture. For example, Tony explained during an interview that church planters do their work in a context with “a lot more people willing to step into a startup, willing to step into that new, maybe riskier

thing than go work in an established place”, which he called “a generational thing” before saying, “church planting seems to be much more “in”, I guess. It’s kind of the “in thing” right now”; Gerry echoed Tony’s sentiment by saying, “I think church planting is the cool thing to do right now.” Importantly, though, church planter occupational identity discourse seems to hinge not on *why* church planting is cool, but on *who* is cool when they plant churches. As Pete explained, “A lot of cool guys are doing church planting ... and a lot of people want to be cool. Cool, of course, is meaningful. There’s a lot of significant identity things tied up in that.” When I asked Pete to clarify what kinds of “identity things” are “tied up” in being “cool”, he described who “cool” is:

Cool is a go-getter, and a go-getter is not a bad thing. They’re kind of like a trailblazer, the spirit of people that don’t want to build on someone else’s foundation. So I think there were some heroes being lifted up. That had a big impact in terms of younger guys, right? Let’s just say twenty-something and thirty-somethings, but for sure twenty-somethings. There’s a heartbeat to want to do something, kind of a more intense, strong view of Christianity. A go-getter, get after it kind of thing that fits really nicely with a church planting narrative.

First, Pete suggests that being “cool” identifies who “fits” an enterprising “church planting narrative” – specifically, young men, who are valorized as “trailblazers” with a “strong view of Christianity.” Secondly, Pete refers to the “cool guys” doing church planting that young men want to be like as “heroes.” I pressed in on this term with Pete and other church planters during interviews, asking them who the “cool heroes” of church planting are; in response, Pete gave me what he called “your typical list in the world that we swim in”:

You just think about the last ten years, it’s hard to talk about church planting without talking about Tim Keller. It’s hard to talk about church planting without talking about Mark Driscoll. But even before that, you think about Rick Warren ... and then a whole host who began to form Acts 29. So those words, those

ideas, those aspirations and godly impulses had some flesh to them.

Tim Keller, who planted a church in New York City and has written multiple best-selling theological books about church planters, was also identified by Mark as a “very popular author among Evangelicals” and Braden as “popular in Christian circles” in general. Braden also added other names to the list of “heroes”: “You’ve got a guy like J.D. Greear out in North Carolina who has a pretty big platform, writes books, and speaks at conferences ... and [Matt] Chandler obviously through Acts 29, Mark Driscoll through Acts 29.” What is significant about this list of “cool heroes” of church planting is not just that each person on the list is male; they are also all *white* men. Thus, for church planters to embody the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner, they must be able to access the identity of these cool, white, male icons of religious entrepreneurship. And, those who can embody this identity are attributed religious celebrity status:

I think even just in our day and age and our culture, with social media and big conferences in the church, you’ve got a lot of guys that are headliners – almost like celebrity pastors, who are either church planters or pro-church planting. And they have got a voice, and they’re influential, and they are writing books.
(Braden)

I often observed church planters in this study attempting to embody the notion of the influential, conference-headlining, masculine celebrity church planter during church services. For example, as I observed in Chapter Four when describing church planter production tasks, when Pete took the stage to preach at Sardis Church, it felt like I was in the audience at a TED talk conference, an event where crowds are typically marked by the casual dress and technological savvy of trendy hipster culture. In keeping with this image, Pete was dressed casually in an untucked green plaid button down shirt, trendy

jeans, and casual leather shoes; as he spoke, he stood between two red spotlights that illuminated church logo banners, used catchy visual aids, and wore a face microphone with a battery pack clipped to his belt like someone delivering a TED talk might. Similarly, Craig spiked his hair and wore jeans, Converse sneakers, and a black blazer with a Smyrna Church-branded t-shirt underneath while preaching. I even performed this identity in the field, wearing jeans, sneakers, and an untucked plaid button down during observations due to my knowledge that such an outfit would help me “fit” the scene; and fit I did, as I had the uncomfortable experience of a Smyrna Church volunteer asking me for work directions after one church service, apparently assuming that I was part of the church plant staff.

What the preceding data demonstrates is the normalization of a figurative entrepreneurial church planter who is “cool” – that is, able to perform youthfulness, whiteness, and masculinity. Importantly, church planters also utilized other discursive themes to bolster occupational identification with images of the entrepreneur (and thus, the church planter) as naturally masculine – and, crucially, *to mitigate the femininity of the religious figurative practitioner*. For example, the Acts 29 website states that the success of the church planter network depends on the extent to which it “recruits men” and “assesses men based on core competencies”, one of which is described as “Entrepreneurial Aptitude”. Similarly, Fellowship Associates, a church planter training program affiliated with three of the churches in this study, defines its “ideal candidate profile” as a man who has “an entrepreneurial spirit.” Moreover, the Fellowship Associates website claims that the network “exists to call men into Authentic Manhood

and to train leaders to plant churches” and defines “what an Authentic Man does – rejects passivity, accepts responsibility, and courageously faces difficult choices, doing the right thing.” By aligning the identity of the “Authentic Man” with that of the pioneering, risk-taking, responsible entrepreneur – and by implying that men must be trained to achieve this identity – this discourse suggests that not only are entrepreneurs a specific kind of man, but that *real men are entrepreneurs*; and, therefore, the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner of church planting can only be accomplished by *real men*.

A variety of other church planter discourses contribute to normalizing a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner according to a particular vision of “real” manhood. Building on “hard work” discourse, church planters construct an image of the church planter as a rugged, physically fit soldier. Indeed, when describing who the church planter should be to take on hard work, Patrick (2010) wrote, “The image that arises in my mind here is that of a soldier who refuses to stay in the foxhole no matter how many bullets are flying on the outside” (p. 95), adding that church planters must be men with “great courage” who are willing to stay on the “front lines” (p. 98). In this vein, Owen suggested that the work culture at a church plant should be “like a battleship, not a cruise ship”, and Gerry, who works with Owen, explained that he calls his fellow workers his “brothers” because “they get in the trenches with me.” Accordingly, the masculine church planter is expected to discipline his body in order to be ready for war; Patrick’s (2010) church planting war heroes who leave their foxholes are “determined” and “physically fit men” who are “careful about what they eat and drink and how they exercise”, because “the more in shape you are physically, the more energy you will have

to do what God has called you to do” (pp. 99-100). Similarly, the Acts 29 website claims that competent church planters “recognize the appropriate value of bodily exercise.” Moreover, church planters normalized the physical ruggedness of male bodies as biblical. For example, Patrick (2010) describes Jesus as “physically laboring under the sun with strong biceps and an even stronger work ethic”; and one Ephesus Church sermon I observed, titled “Biblical Manhood”, was delivered using images of dirty work gloves, raw wood, hammers, axes, and other tools projected on screens above the words, “Love well. Work well.” Practically, what these discourses achieve is not only the continued normalization of the figurative church planter as enterprising and masculine, but also its seemingly extreme distancing from both the femininity of relational service work and other masculine identities that do not align with this “rugged” image.

As Ashcraft argues (2013), occupational identity evolves through both alignment with and distance from certain embodied social identities. Thus, discursive images of the church planter-as-authentic entrepreneurial man are bolstered not just by their coalescence with rugged masculinity, but by their remoteness from femininity and other masculine identities – and, furthermore, by church planter claims of femininity as a domain which “authentic manhood” still regulates (Ashcraft, 2013). These gender effects can be observed in discursive constructions of the church planter as a heterosexual patriarch; and, more specifically, as a man who must be patriarchal at home before he can plant a church. For example, Patrick (2010) claims that church planters should be men who “are attracted to taking responsibility in the home and the church” because they “sense the call to follow Christ in leadership as an inspiring and uniquely

masculine one” (p. 17). Moreover, “taking responsibility in the home” is specifically characterized as caring for dependent church planter wives and families; Patrick (2010) writes, “If you can’t answer your wife’s theological questions, you can’t be the one who answers the theological questions of the church” (p. 54), and an Acts 29 blog post titled “Biblical qualifications of a pastor” (2015) states, “If a man does not know how to manage his own family, he will not know how to take care of God’s church.”

While these patriarchal themes may not be surprising given that they emerge from adherents to a faith with conservative views of the family, their importance for *church planter* as an occupational identity is the way in which these discourses further authorize thinking of that identity as typically masculine *and* able to regulate feminine identities around it. In fact, church planter discourse suggests that the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner should be an outcome of entrepreneurial regulation of the church planter’s marital identity:

All of the energy that you have toward initiating, pursuing, and strategizing for the mission of God through the church you lead should be an outgrowth of your marriage. Don’t waste all of your entrepreneurial spirit on the church! (Patrick, “Loving your wife and the mission,” 2015)

In other words, it is not the feminine religious church planter who must take charge at home, but the masculine entrepreneurial church planter. Not only is the wife in this marriage characterized as completely beholden to the entrepreneurial spirit of her church planter husband, but also she is described as emotionally and sexually submissive at home. The Acts 29 website describes the competent church planter as able to “acknowledge a healthy sexual relationship and purity in his marriage”, and Patrick (2010) writes that masculine church planters “are to take the lead in emotional, social,

and sexual connection with their wives” (p. 46). And yet, even sexual entrepreneurship at home is apparently regulated by religious entrepreneurship work; as Patrick (2010) writes, “Making love to your wife is a biblically encouraged way of distracting yourself from the difficulties of ministry” (p. 51). In other words, the masculinity of the figurative entrepreneurial church planter regulates the sexual performance of both the church planter and his spouse at home, such that spousal sex itself is not a personal process of connecting with a feminine person, but instead a function of not thinking about the church planter’s own ruggedly masculine work.

While I did not ask church planters directly about their home lives, or observe them in relationship with their spouses, I did observe how norms of distancing church planter identities from femininity played out at church plants in other ways. First, church plant programming was often highly segregated not only according to gender, but according to gender stereotypes; for example, on the Sardis Church website, men are invited to cook out, play yard games, practice preaching in front of other men, and participate in shotgun and rifle shooting competitions. Women, on the other hand, are invited to attend Bible studies and “high tea socials” with finger foods. Similarly, the Ephesus Church website describes men from the church taking mountain hiking trips, while women are described as gathering around tables to have dinner. These kinds of activity structures reflect the gendered division of *church planter* as an occupational identity by suggesting that real men want to participate in activities that contribute a sense of ruggedness to their identities that feminine identities cannot access.

Secondly, the distancing of *church planter* from feminine identities played out in

the way that women church plant workers in this study were faced with choices regarding negotiating work and family time that men church plant workers did not seem to wrestle with. Teresa, for example, is both the only woman working at her church plant, and also the only worker there who asked me if she had permission to bring her children to our interview – which was held at her workspace. When I asked Teresa if she tells other people that she is a church planter, she responded:

I don't say that about myself. I would say that about Pete and Jack. Mostly I don't say that about myself because I am in a strange place where I only work part-time, and I mostly work from home because I have little kids. Most of their day is building relationships by taking people to lunch or getting coffee with people. I'm not in a place where I can do that with a lot of folks ... I'm a woman and I have kids. It just looks different for me.

Teresa's answer implies an assumption that the "strange place" she finds herself in regarding her work and occupation is not related to her ability to do the actual work tasks, but instead to her identity as a woman and a mother. Thus, her work identity "looks different" from Pete and Jack's work identities, not because Teresa is less capable than Pete or Jack, but because Pete and Jack do not identify as women and are thus able access and claim *church planter* as a masculine and enterprising occupational identity in ways that Teresa cannot. Moreover, by saying that "most of their day is building relationships" while most of her day is spent being a mother, Teresa implies that even the feminine relational work of church planters belongs to men who are not expected to do family work.

Paradoxically, the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner also gives some women church plant workers the ability to choose how they structure their own identities (see Gill & Ganesh, 2007). For example, Scarlett told me that she is "intentional about having

that division” between work and her family, adding, “I’m not giving up another day in sacrificing my kid’s time with me just to have another half-a-day meeting.” When I asked her how she decides how to divide her time, she explained:

I’m available when it’s appropriate to be available. But I need to be available for my family and not ever put them to the wayside, because ministry doesn’t come first. I’m wife and mom, homeschool mom, *then* children’s pastor. (Scarlett’s emphasis added)

Thus, Scarlett is able to leverage the control her entrepreneurial work role gives her over her time to choose an identity hierarchy that privileges her preferred family roles.

Ultimately, however, this section demonstrates that the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner of church planting is propped up by entrepreneur/ship discourses that normalize heteronormative and hegemonic masculinity. In other words, as church planters discursively celebrate the entrepreneur as a masculine figure, *church planter* as an occupational identity comes to be seen as normally existing under the purview of men who are unlikely to choose other feminine identities first, such as “homeschool mom”.

Contradicting, Resisting, and Rearticulating “Church Planter”

In older congregations, leaders emphasize tradition, tenure, routine, and kinship ties. New congregations, on the other hand, attract a higher percentage of venturesome people who value creativity, risk, innovation and future orientation. Many of these men and women would never be attracted or compelled into significant ministry apart from the appearance of these new bodies. (Tim Keller, 2002, *Why Plant Churches*)

By way of conclusion, I briefly touch on how entrepreneurialism in church planter work seems to be characterized as an ordained opportunity to “be enterprising” in an effort to (re)contextualize religious work and identities for cultural relevance. Specifically, as the Tim Keller quote above begins to suggest, church planters make

sense of the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner as incentivizing religious enterprise by resisting the cultural disengagement thought to characterize traditional religious organizing and identities. Indeed, through an entrepreneurial lens, church planters described their work as “getting away from this religion where we just kind of build buildings and hold some Bible studies” (Braden), such that church planters think of their churches as a “community of people. It’s not that building with a name on it” (Kason). In this, church planters see their constructed entrepreneurial ideal as having value by rearticulating a religious work identity that has cultural value; as Owen explained, “There’s a desire for, I don’t want to say less tradition, but it’s more like – a lot of historical churches, they seem to be rigid and stuck in their ways and not adapting to what’s going on around them”, while church planters are “able to adapt to the culture” by giving people an opportunity to “be involved in something new.” Later in this section, Table 3 summarizes church planter descriptions of both *church planter* and *entrepreneur* to demonstrate how church planters attempt to more or less align these occupational identities as they narratively construct working selves.

Indeed, church planters seem to understand the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner as a necessary accomplishment because it creates value by resisting the diminishing value of traditional religious processes and identities. Teresa explained how church planter work provides distinct religious and organizational value apart from established religious organizations:

Well, a huge distinction is the fact that big churches are well-oiled machines. They already have systems in place. When you come in, you just fit into their niche and you just keep the wheel going. Whereas a church plant, we are able to be a part of building the systems, instead of being a part of somewhere who says,

well, that's what we have always done – but it doesn't really provide any fruit. Other church planters echoed Teresa's sentiment that church planter work creates new religious value by breaking away from the “niche” of traditional religious organizing. Kason explained, “It's really positive that there's no history. It's a new thing, and I think that's good. I think that's why it reaches a lot more people ... you're making the history”, and Braden described the lack of “history” as an occupational privilege, saying, “I think I get to do this kind of on a blank slate. I get to go back to the basics, where at an established church things are already kind of set in place.” Simultaneously, however, church planters also mentioned that entrepreneurialism could lead to feelings of exhaustion:

So everything from recruiting volunteers, communicating with volunteers, having events, doing anything – it's like, this is the first time we've done it. So in a sense, there's freedom there, because there's no baggage. There's no, “Hey, we usually do this.” But there's also a sense of a struggle there, because it's really tiring. You've got to muster up so much to create something new every time you do something. (Kason)

When taken into consideration alongside the figurative religious practitioner detailed in Chapter Five, this discourse demonstrates the way that church planters are presented with significant occupational contradictions. On one hand, they must accomplish a figurative religious practitioner who adopts a morality of work based on the gospel – a religious idea as old and “traditional” as Christianity itself – and on the other hand, they must accomplish a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner who is organizationally enterprising and culturally adaptive. Along these lines, if we think back to an earlier portion of this chapter in which Saul questioned church planter narratives of “newness” (e.g., church planting is “opening a new McDonalds that still serves the same menu as

hopefully every other McDonalds does”), we might say that it is not doing something new but rather *telling the story of newness* that helps solidify *church planter* as possessing entrepreneurial credentials.

Table 3

Summary of Entrepreneur/ship Discourse

	The entrepreneur is...	The church planter is...
An Innovative Pioneer	Driven, passionate, and motivated to provide a new product “It’s a guy who is self-motivated, he’s a mobilizer of people, he has a pioneer spirit, he can build things from the ground up, take charge of the hill guy, he can raise money, he’s good talking with people.” (Gerry)	Highly driven, naturally competitive, strong-willed, persistent, passionate, and unafraid of failure at work “I think a church planter has got to be entrepreneurial by nature. You’ve got to have a pioneer spirit.” (Craig)
A Creative Visionary	A starter or dreamer who is goal-oriented and purposeful with their work time “I think an entrepreneur is a starter, somebody that has a vision, somebody that has a dream, somebody who is kind of on their own at some level that wants to go out and start their course.” (Braden)	A starter with a God-given vision, energetic, inspirational, and able to build things from “ground zero” “A church planter has got to be somebody who not only has a compelling vision, but is able to communicate that compelling vision.” (Saul)
Taker of Risks and Responsibility	Willfully and heroically aspires to the challenge of innovation, and able to tolerate task ambiguity due to a natural inclination to “do the right things” “Entrepreneurs, they just want to dig in and say, I don’t need all of these things to be answered before I dive in, let’s just figure it out.” (Tony)	Adventurous in the face of difficulty, rational and calculated when taking risks, intrinsically motivated, disciplined, and accountable for excellence at work “Even in church, we have to take risks, which sometimes I think churches are afraid to do. There is a certain amount of risk that you have to take so that you can grow and learn ... I don’t think it’s healthy for any organization to become stagnant.” (Jenn)

Table 3 cont.

	The entrepreneur is...	The church planter is...
Popular, Cool, and Masculine	Fun, influential, and worthy of cultural celebration	Young, heroic, iconic, trailblazing, trendy, and courageous; also, normatively white, heterosexual, physically fit, patriarchal, “real man”
	“It is cool to be a part of something that is new and fresh and young.” (Johnny)	“You’ve got a lot of guys that are headliners, almost like celebrity pastors, who are either church planters or pro-church planting. They’ve got a voice ... they’re influential.” (Braden)
	“Entrepreneurship is popular.” (Kason)	“All of the energy that you have toward initiating ... the mission of God through the church should be an outgrowth of your marriage. Don’t waste all of your entrepreneurial spirit on the church!” (Patrick, 2010)

A second way that the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner of church planting seems to contradict and resist the figurative religious practitioner is through the construction of competitive growth as a success metric that cannot be fully abandoned by the enterprising figure. When I asked Craig how he measures success at his church plant, he responded differently than other church planters by pointing out why growth is a necessary success metric:

I think the easy answer is numbers. There are going to be two answers. There are going to be the hyper-spiritual people that are going to say, “Well, I don’t focus on numbers. I only focus on the depth of people.” And that’s great, but if you’ve only got ten people, your church is going to close. I mean, healthy things grow. That’s the principle of life.

In this, Craig evokes the capitalist morality of enterprise discourse by suggesting that organizational growth is not only positive, but also healthy. This competing morality of

work was also expressed by other church planters, including Braden, who told me, “It’s simple – your church doesn’t succeed or it does”, clarifying that “the majority of church plants fail” because “they don’t get traction, they don’t get people, they don’t get the resources to sustain themselves, and then they just vanish.” Additionally, for church planters who view success through a capitalist resource-based lens, *sustainability* is a buzzword; for example, Gerry said, “Church planters can be successful because they think they have a good number of people coming to the church. They’re self-sustainable”, and Mark clarified, “Successful means at a minimum, self-sustaining, both in leadership and in resources after a certain period.” Interestingly, within this discourse, Braden revealed that one reason church planters may struggle with occupational ambiguity and competing identity figures is that, from an enterprising perspective, church planter success means church plants should eventually *stop being church plants*:

I think some of it is that you’re not a church plant anymore – that you’re an actual church, and I think that line gets to be when you’re self-sustaining financially. It’s kind of like raising kids. When is adulthood? At some level you could say, well, it’s eighteen, or it’s when they graduate college, but really, it’s when they’re on their own, and they’re self supporting, and they’re paying their own bills and paying their mortgage. They’re self-sustaining. And I think the same is true with the church plant. When we get to that point where we’re self-sustaining, we’re no longer a church plant – we’re an actual church.

This economic metaphor raises significant questions for the occupational identity work of church planters. Specifically, if church plants are not understood to be “actual churches”, is it even possible to understand *church planter* as an “actual occupational identity”? Thus, much like the notion that church planters cannot be real men without being entrepreneurial, this discourse suggests that church plants cannot be real churches without achieving economic success – an idea that appears to contradict religious

notions of success as meeting community needs and helping people find deeper spiritual meanings.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that church planters differently understand the degree of overlap between the figurative entrepreneurial and religious practitioners they construct. Some church planters, like Tom, argue that church planters must be entrepreneurs:

Everything that entrepreneurs do, we're doing. The only thing that isn't the same is the end goal and the product. The product is the gospel. The end goal is the relationship with God ... But you *have* to be an entrepreneur. You *have* to be able to wear many hats. You *have* to understand different dynamics of organizational structure and cash flow analysis and database management. (Tom's emphasis added)

Tom was not alone in this sentiment; Jenn agreed, stating that *church planter* is “absolutely an entrepreneurial role. There is nothing about it that's not entrepreneurial.” However, other church planters ultimately said that *church planter* is not quite an entrepreneur; Scarlett pointed to the church planter's sense of religious accountability to God as a major distinction, explaining, “There's some similarities, because the thing about being an entrepreneur is, the whole reason people go into business for themselves is so they don't have to answer to a higher up, right? Well, in ministry, we do answer to a higher up.” Gerry added to this by articulating a sense of spiritual obligation to both God and other people as a major point of tension for church planters as they wrestle with religious and entrepreneurial occupational ideals:

I agree with it because it's a startup. You have to raise money; you have to build a staff or a team. But the reason I don't necessarily equate them the same is that entrepreneurs don't have to worry about people's souls. They don't have to worry about people's problems ... I think that's the tension that we have to wrestle with, because you need the entrepreneurial spirit, but you also got to be a pastor

too. Entrepreneurs don't have to be a pastor. When you just equate the two ... it's like you've kind of lessened the call of being a church planter. (Gerry)

Gerry's commentary evokes the sense that church planters experience occupational identity work in complex and contradictory patterns, where distinctions between religious and entrepreneurial identities are muddled such that the people who do church planter work feel that neither identity is fully achievable without lessening the value of the other. Moreover, the commentary in this chapter suggests that entrepreneurialism, as a powerful sociocultural identity discourse that carries the assumptions of enterprise across work and life boundaries, competes with deeply-held identity values and, in some cases, makes workers feel like those values have been cheapened even as they pursue accomplishing the entrepreneur as a valuable cultural identity icon.

This chapter showed how entrepreneur/ship actively intersects with the work and occupational identities of church planters in an enterprise culture. Specifically, enterprise overshadows church planter work experiences such that church planters make sense of church planting as “hard work” akin to enterprising start-up work, and celebrate the entrepreneur as a “hard worker” who is characterized by pioneerism, vision, and risk-taking. Furthermore, church planters respond to questions about who does *church planter* as a line of work by discursively normalizing a figurative entrepreneurial practitioner marked by youthfulness, whiteness, and particular images of “rugged” masculinity and heteronormativity (Ashcraft, 2013). Church planters attempt to embody this ideal occupational image by performing popular images of the entrepreneur, and by creating both discursive and bodily distance between *church planter* and feminine identities or other masculine identities that do not “fit” notions of “real men” as rugged,

physically fit, and sexually enterprising at home (McDonald, 2015). In this, the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner is positioned to mitigate the femininity of the figurative religious practitioner in its alignment with social work and relational care.

Additionally, we might say that the gendering of the figurative entrepreneurial practitioner is more apparent in its masculine manifestations than the less obvious femininity of the religious figure; thus, church planter discourse that idealizes the entrepreneur is more capable of (a) obscuring the femininity of relational church planter work and (b) reinforcing the patriarchy of religious organizing in general as relevant for organizing performances of *church planter* at the local level. Ultimately, this analysis shows that church planters are beholden to competing religious and entrepreneurial occupational figures that simultaneously interpellate the church planter's sense of self at and beyond work, blurring distinctions between religious and entrepreneurial identity discourses, and leaving the church planter in a haze of complex, contradictory, and ultimately unresolvable occupational identity work. I consider some of these implications in greater depth and make concluding arguments about the project as a whole in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Churches are a cornerstone of American life. There are roughly 350,000 congregations in the United States, and many of them do great work, such as feeding the hungry or clothing the poor. (John Oliver on HBO's Last Week Tonight; Carvell, 2015)

I feel like church planting is more about training up a team of believers to work together for the sake of the gospel than it is about creating an entity of the church. The church is just... what it is. (Tom, September 2015)

I begin my conclusion to this project by presenting these statements about what “church work” is to first point out the ambiguity with which such work is known at a broad sociocultural level in the United States. Though this project has attempted to characterize evangelical Christian church planters as one type of American religious worker, notions of what religious work *should* look like are plural and seemingly difficult to pin down for both the people doing this work and other workers who may interact with them. Secondly, I use these statements to illustrate how what we think *religion* is organizes what we think *religious work* should be, such that religion acts as an organizing difference that should not be overlooked. Moreover, the disparity between these statements is not solely driven by religion, but also by the speaker’s understanding of the *value of work*; consider, for example, how John Oliver – who hosts *Last Week Tonight*, an influential Emmy-award-winning news program on HBO that averaged 4.1 million viewers per episode in its first season alone (O’Connell, 2014) – expresses a popular view that values religious work in terms of community service, while Tom

couches the value of his everyday religious work in the seemingly entrepreneurial terms of training and teamwork. Teasing out and spotlighting these dueling religious work narratives – along with their implications for the religious worker and the communities for and in which they work – is at the heart of this project, and drives my central argument that enterprising shifts in religious organizing and occupational identity work must be taken seriously because they represent “real world” shifts in community participation, civic practice, and cultural life, both in the United States and abroad.

I use the remainder of this concluding chapter to summarize the findings and arguments that I presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, and to extend the discussion of enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, religion, and occupational identity within which the entire project is situated. Additionally, I propose the *occupational ecosystem* as a theoretical construct that builds upon and problematizes Ashcraft’s (2013) *glass slipper*. Toward these ends, this final chapter proceeds as follows: first, I situate the chapter and the project as a whole by revisiting the research problems I presented in Chapter 1, as well as my proposal for investigating these problems. In this section, I also reintroduce my research questions and briefly summarize their related findings. Secondly, I introduce key theoretical “takeaway” implications of this study, including the *occupational ecosystem* and the constellation of ideas that undergird it. Then, I return to my research problems to present related practical and social implications of this dissertation for both church plant practitioners and researchers studying entrepreneur/ship. Finally, I conclude the chapter by recognizing a few limitations of this study, and by proposing new

directions for the study of religious work, entrepreneur/ship, and occupational identity that this dissertation highlights.

(Religious) Work and Identity Under the Umbrella of Enterprise

I began this exploration of communicative intersections between enterprise culture, entrepreneur/ship, and contemporary religious organizing by suggesting that organization scholars have a significant opportunity to expand our knowledge of the organizing effects of both enterprising and religious discourses. Specifically, I argued that we could begin doing this by storying these discourses in local contexts where they are central, dynamic, and meaningful to human narratives and experiences of work and occupational identity (du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Koschmann, 2013). To characterize the role I believe my research plays in taking up this opportunity, I positioned this study as responding to three key research problems, which I review briefly here before returning to their practical implications later in the chapter.

First, this project addressed the limited scope with which organization scholars often view the people who do religious work as they negotiate their day-to-day jobs and accomplish occupational identities. By settling for the Protestant Ethic as a catch-all narrative for intersections between religion, organizing, and work, I argue that our knowledge of religious work and identities remains too static to tease out the complexities of local intersections between religious and economic discourses for people who do religious work on daily basis (Koschmann, 2013; Weber, 1930/2008). Taking on this problem is worthy of our attention because, given that churches and places of worship remain significant social sites, updating our understandings of the occupational

dynamics of churches and other religious work sites has much to offer in terms of uncovering the cultural and economic pressures affecting American work and life in general (Chaves, 2011). In other words, we might say that changes in the ways Americans interact with religious organizing and work also represent changes in American civic life and community association; thus, I argue that a more dynamic knowledge of local expressions of religious work is necessary and instructive for organization scholars who wish to have a greater depth of understanding about the overall experience of living and working in an enterprise culture.

As an interdisciplinary field of research, organizational communication offers the opportunity to study this problem in terms of how religious work roles and identities like *church planter* take on meaning through everyday work interactions, where we might begin to understand how “professionalizing” discourses such as enterprise and entrepreneur/ship are more or less influential (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). Within this field, I adopted a discursive approach to this problem by analyzing how church planters draw on various discursive resources to narratively construct and enact ideal working selves (Wieland, 2010). I operationalized this approach through an ethnographically inspired methodological design, wherein I sought to represent *in situ* constructions and enactments of *church planter* as an occupational identity via participant observation and shadowing; furthermore, I sought to illuminate these local expressions through formal interviews and textual analysis that considered how church planter performances and explanations of work connect to broader ideas about religion and entrepreneur/ship. This approach meshes with my social constructionist commitments by putting church planter

work into context through foregrounding the stories church planters tell about themselves and their everyday jobs. Importantly, these stories reveal not only the dynamic nature of religion and entrepreneur/ship as work activities and identities, but also the incompleteness of enterprise and religion as ways of knowing, and the ways in which church planters discursively enact, resist, or transform them to construct and shape occupational selves (Fenwick, 2008).

The second research problem this study addressed is problematically bounded contemporary thinking about who or what constitutes an entrepreneur, and how enterprise and entrepreneur/ship are more or less expressed and enacted in emerging work contexts (Gill, 2013). While there is some agreement among scholars who study enterprise as a language and discourse that it encourages entrepreneurial self-representation across social and work spheres (Fenwick, 2001; Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000), there continues to be a “corporate bias” within entrepreneur/ship studies, such that scholars rarely consider how the entrepreneurial commodification of the self plays out in emerging noncommercial work contexts, including church plants. Analyzing how entrepreneurialism extends into and beyond noncommercial work contexts – and, as I argue, especially emerging *religious* work contexts – is important, because of widespread social shifts wherein people are actively changing their religious identities and activities to align with their socioeconomic and political commitments (Chaves, 2011). Thus, knowing how religious workers like church planters wrestle with entrepreneurial pressures on their occupational identities is important for also understanding how religious communities like church plants come to privilege or

disadvantage certain workers or community members based on who is deemed capable of “being enterprising” (Bruni et al., 2004). In other words, thinking about the presence of the entrepreneur in religious contexts is necessary to extend our understandings of how and why the entrepreneur has become a preferred class of worker (Gill, 2014).

To take on this problem as well as the ways in which it intersects with the first research problem, I approached the relationship between church planter work, occupational identity, and entrepreneurialism through the lens of the *glass slipper* metaphor (Ashcraft, 2013). While the glass slipper is an approach to occupational identity research that is relevant beyond the field of organizational communication alone, it is useful for this communication-focused dissertation in that it suggests that we come to know an occupation according to the social identities discursively and materially associated with it. That is, the glass slipper helps us conceive of *church planter* as an occupational identity that is influenced by intersecting discourses of religion, enterprise, and entrepreneur/ship as they are spoken at and about work by the people who do church planter work (Ashcraft, 2013). Thus, I analyzed the ways in which *church planter* is communicatively imagined and socially enacted by using participant observation, shadowing, and interviews to investigate how religion and entrepreneur/ship are expressed by church planters as they go about their work (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Ashcraft, 2007; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Ultimately, this study attends to limitations in contemporary images of the entrepreneur by theorizing *church planter* as an emerging occupational identity that more or less takes on the shape and value of entrepreneur/ship, especially as

religious workers search for new forms of sociocultural relevance in response to the slow but steady decline of American participation in “traditional” church communities (Chaves, 2011).

The third research problem addressed by this dissertation is the need for greater theoretical and practical knowledge about how religion and entrepreneur/ship struggle over, manifest, and normalize certain constellations of identity difference. In conjunction with the glass slipper approach, which suggests that we come to know occupational identities by asking not only *what* an occupation does but *who* does it (Ashcraft, 2013), I approached this problem by borrowing from McDonald’s (2015) queer theory framework of normativity to consider how constructions of *church planter* as an entrepreneurial occupational identity reveal privileged patterns of difference that also disadvantage other identities and make claims about who should be able to access *church planter* at/as work. This problem is important to investigate because both *entrepreneur* and *church planter* are not occupational identities that are enacted in isolation, and the way that these identities come to discursively and materially coalesce around particular normative assumptions about preferred selves is likely to have a significant shaping effect on the communities in which these occupational identities occur. In other words, while religion and enterprise do “body work” on church planters by shaping who they identify as normatively embodying *church planter* (Trethewey, 1999; Trethewey, Scott, & LeGreco, 2006), these discourses also organize expressions of the kinds of bodies that should or should not be included in the material presence of church plants as work sites and religious communities.

Organizational communication provides an opportunity to study this research problem by considering how organizing ideas that involve identities, including religion and entrepreneur/ship, come to intermingle and construct embodied identity norms in the everyday talk of workers (Jones & Murtola, 2012). That is, a communicational approach to this research problem highlights how the body becomes a signpost for the effects of religion, entrepreneur/ship, and other organizing discourses, such that encountering and observing worker bodies at work enhances our efforts to speak to those discourses (Ashcraft, 2005; Eleff & Trethewey, 2006). Thus, this investigation of normativity in constructions and enactments of *church planter* is motivated by the notion that communication gives meaning to and constrains our ability to make sense of the symbolic and material at work (Ashcraft et al., 2009). Ultimately, uncovering issues of normativity in church planting, including how church planters navigate issues of masculinity and femininity, is important for generating more dynamic and meaningful insights about the experience of contemporary religious work, particularly as church planters more or less cast themselves as enterprising figures who get to do “moral” forms of work (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008; Bruni et al., 2004; Fenwick, 2001; Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000; Mulholland, 1996; Reed, 1996).

Taken as a whole, the approach to enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, work, and religion taken up by this dissertation matters for organizational communication as a discipline because it contributes a more complex and situated view of enterprise as an occupational discourse and religious organizations as socially important sites of work and identity. If, as Ashcraft (2011) suggests, the aim of organizational communication

scholarship is to generate “communicational explanations” that account for communication as an “ongoing, situated activity” through which the representational and the material become entwined to reveal lived realities (p. 16), then this dissertation presents such explanations by employing a study design centered on an intersubjective ethnography, wherein the occupational voices and work experiences of church planters were platformed through observation, shadowing, interviews, and the analysis of relevant texts created by church planters that speak to how *church planter* should be performed at and as work. Moreover, by using a discursive framework to view local expressions and performances of *church planter* as an occupational identity that emerges concomitantly with religion and enterprise, this dissertation adds to the social constructionist framework organizational communication scholars have developed for knowing the complex relationship between discourse, culture, identity, and organizing (Allen, 2005; Ashcraft et al., 2009; Carlone & Taylor, 1998; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Wieland, 2010). Next, I briefly revisit my three research questions and summarize their related findings before turning my attention to the theoretical and practical implications suggested by this dissertation.

Research Question One: Explaining and Performing Church Planter at/as Work

The first research question was: *How do church planters and texts about church planter identities explain and perform church planting as work?* Asking this question allowed me to respond directly to the first two research problems I presented, in that it follows the glass slipper metaphor by encouraging not only a dynamic, localized knowledge of the “nature of work tasks and the organizational forms that crop up around

them”, but also keeping an eye toward “the figurative practitioners with whom such work is aligned” (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 26).

This research question was primarily answered in Chapter Four, which addresses *what* church planter work is by describing how church planters talk about and perform their job tasks on a daily basis. In this chapter, I argued that church planters are involved in a complex and confusing enmeshment of tasks referred to as *mundane/ministry work*. This kind of work is an entangled web of religious and “worldly” tasks, often done at the same time, to the extent that doing work that might be thought of as less than spiritual comes to appear as a prerequisite for and an outcome of doing spiritual ministry work (and vice versa). Within this framework, I showed how church planters explain and perform a mixture of tasks at and as work, including meetings, prayer, and entrepreneurial production tasks akin to organizing theater in the service of “putting on a Sunday show” (Boje et al., 2003); and yet, as church planters story their everyday work as disestablished and lacking occupational rhythm or life balance, they do not necessarily experience their occupation as having a “predictable job quality” (Ashcraft, 2013). Importantly, these findings pointed this dissertation forward to Chapters Five and Six by suggesting that knowing the nature of *church planter* as an occupational identity means going beyond the *what* of work and unveiling constructions of the “prototypical practitioner” that yields the content, value, and practice of *who* the church planter *should be* (Ashcraft, 2013).

Research Question Two: Claiming a Religious/Entrepreneurial Practitioner

The second research question was: *How do church planters and texts about church planter identities employ religious and/or economic discourses to make claims about and construct a figurative practitioner?* The relevance of this research question is located in its ability to foreground the construction of an occupational prototype or “figurative practitioner” in church planter discourse and narrative identity work (Ashcraft, 2013). Thus, while the work of church planters identified in Chapter Four may produce church plants, the glass slipper framework helps tease out the discursive ideal that normalizes church planter identity work and organizes church plants as work sites and community spaces.

My second research question was primarily answered in Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five investigates the discursive struggle over this question by considering how constituents of *church planter* across church plant worksites narrate and attempt to embody a figurative *religious* practitioner. Importantly, Chapter Five began by revealing the varied and ambiguous responses the people who do church planter work gave to the question, “What would you say a church planter is?” In particular, Deb’s description of not only her church planter identity but also the identity work she does to construct that identity as “silly” highlighted the discursive haziness church plant workers wrestle with when making sense of who they are. This opening section demonstrated that *church planter* is ultimately a fragmented, unsettled, and evolutionary occupational identity, and that the workers claiming that identity often seem to be unsure about what it means for them; thus, Chapter Five raises questions about whether or not knowing certain

figurative practitioners requires thinking beyond *who* the glass slipper fits by asking whether such a slipper exists at all.

Chapter Five also shows how church plant workers use religious discourses to construct a *religious* occupational ideal who experiences a calling, adopts a “gospel-centered” morality of work, and assumes an obligation to community service work. Importantly, while church planters evoke notions of the Protestant Ethic in their descriptions of a supernatural calling motivating their work, they also contradict this ethic by highlighting the gospel as a community-oriented morality of work that shifts the meaning of success and failure to discovering deeper spiritual meanings rather than numerical growth and accumulation. Thus, while church planters recognize growth as a mark of capitalistic success for the entrepreneur, the figurative *religious* practitioner characterizes growth as “worldly” and therefore out of step with the gospel-centered morality of the ideal church planter. In this sense, as church plant workers attempt to discursively accomplish *church planter* as a religious work identity, doing so requires them to adopt a morality of work that denies them entrepreneurial success even as they take on entrepreneurial forms of labor.

Chapter Six turns my analysis toward the ways in which church planters construct and enact a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner, who variously and actively intersects with, challenges, and contests the figurative religious practitioner. First, Chapter Six demonstrates how church planters begin to idealize entrepreneur/ship by storying and making sense of their *mundane/ministry work* as “hard work” that is like entrepreneurial start-up work; in this, church planters heroicize popular sociocultural

images attached to enterprise and entrepreneur/ship, such as the nobility of hard work, the “sin” of laziness, and the valor of risk-taking. Then, in order to compare how church planters discursively construct images of *entrepreneur* alongside *church planter*, I showed how church planters use “celebratory talk” to characterize the entrepreneur as a hard worker marked by pioneerism, vision, risk-taking, and underpinnings of whiteness, youthfulness, and masculinity (du Gay, 1996). The second half of Chapter Six reveals church planters discursively normalizing and attempting to enact a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner who, like the celebrated entrepreneur, is characterized by pioneerism, vision, and risk-taking – as well as specific images of youthfulness, whiteness, and “rugged” masculinity and heteronormativity (Ashcraft, 2013). Moreover, by embodying popular images of entrepreneur/ship, such as TED talk conferences, I argue that church planters create significant points of tension between their dual figurative practitioners and highlight *church planter* as normalizing certain masculinities at the expense of other masculine and feminine identities who do not “fit” those norms (McDonald, 2015). Ultimately, Chapters Five and Six work together to address how church planters navigate an occupational position that seems to emerge between two contested and competing visions for who the ideal contemporary church planter *should be* at work, at church, and at home in an enterprise culture.

Research Question Three: Questions of Occupational Normativity and Difference

Finally, the third research question was: *How do assumptions about difference intersect with and participate in the occupational identity work of church planters, and in the creation of texts about church planter identities?* This research question is relevant

because it highlights *church planter* as a “professional jurisdiction” contest – that is, a struggle to socially construct *church planter* by discursively creating ties between the occupation, its work tasks, and the social identities of workers who *should be* associated with *church planter* (Ashcraft, 2013). In other words, this question intentionally calls for knowing *church planter* not just by *what* a church planter does at work, but also according to *with whom* church planters do their work.

This research question was answered across Chapters Five and Six, where I made explicit the ways in which church plant workers navigated and normalized various notions of difference. In this, I leaned upon McDonald’s (2015) normativity framework, which calls us to consider “how privilege and disadvantage are related to the ways in which organizational members enact – and do not enact – the taken-for-granted norms of organizational life”, rather than simply pointing out the presence of sociological categories of difference in organizing (p. 322). In Chapter Five, this focus played out in the juxtaposition of the femininity of care-based church planter social work and the masculinization of the calling in constructions of the figurative *religious* practitioner, as well as in the problematic conflict created by framing the gospel as a multi-racial morality of church planter work that may also problematically obscure the “urban savior” role church planters cast themselves into when entering (and perhaps displacing) urban community cultures.

In Chapter Six, I characterize the normative tensions between masculinity and femininity as central to church planter identity work, as church planters seem to lean on cultural images of the entrepreneur as normatively masculine to mitigate the femininity

of the relational social worker identity that the figurative *religious* practitioner of Chapter Five is obligated to. Moreover, Chapter Six shows church planters enmeshing entrepreneur/ship and religion to make claims about “real men” – the kind of men church planters *should be* – as normatively white, physically fit, patriarchal, and entrepreneurial at home, including within their sexual relationships. Importantly, gender norm contestations that occur in church planter identity work seem to spill over into their community organizing efforts; for example, Sardis Church sponsored gender-segregated community events, such as shotgun shooting competitions for men and tea socials for women. And, though the struggle over the masculinity or femininity of *church planter* often plays out for women church plant workers by questioning whether or not they can actually access their own occupational selves, the construction of a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner also gives some women church planters the ability to choose occupational identity hierarchies or roles that they prefer (Gill & Ganesh, 2007).

Although these answers create an incomplete picture (like all ethnographic work does), my third research question and its corresponding findings unveil the glass slipper effects of *church planter* discourse by revealing the ways in which *church planter* is aligned with certain embodied social identities to create and enact forms of advantage and disadvantage, while obscuring those (dis)advantages as natural features of church planter work (Ashcraft, 2013). Indeed, in the masculinized entanglement between culturally popular visions of the entrepreneur and religious notions of the calling to work, *church planter* seems to appear as *inherently masculine*, such that it becomes “a natural fit for some and a stretch, if not an impossibility, for others” (Ashcraft, 2013, p.

16). And yet, at the same time, the feminine tensions caused by church planter obligations to social work reveal the artificially constructed nature of *church planter* as a normatively masculine identity, and begin to suggest that its “natural evolution” away from feminine (or non-normative masculine) identities is not so natural at all. With these summaries in mind, the remainder of this chapter turns its attention to key theoretical and practical implications suggested by this dissertation.

Theoretical Implications

In this section, I begin to give voice to the ways in which this project nuances our understandings of religious organizing and occupations, as well as notions of enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, and their intersections with contemporary work and life. Although we might draw out a variety of useful implications and meaningful contributions from this project, I limit my discussion in this section by choosing a balanced presentation of theoretical and practical implications. First, I present two significant theoretical implications of the project, including how my work extends and complicates theories of occupations and identities. Secondly, I present three practical implications that clarify what I believe this project means for organization researchers and church plant practitioners; specifically, I align these practical contributions with my research problems in an effort to bring the project together. Finally, I conclude the chapter by briefly discussing some limitations of the project, as well as how they point to future directions for continuing research.

Bringing (religious) work back in. The first theoretical implication that this dissertation highlights is the opportunity organization scholars have to deal with religion

as a more dynamic “force” in the construction and enactment of occupational identities. In the field of organizational communication in particular, there have been calls for scholars to take the organizing effects of religion and spirituality more seriously (Buzzanell & Harter, 2006; Harter & Buzzanell, 2007). This dissertation responds to these calls by underscoring not just the organizing effects of religion, but its *occupational* effects and enactments, including the dynamic ways in which religious occupational identities and ethics are interpellated by other significant organizing discourses that structure religious work tasks. In other words, this dissertation models one way that organizational communication scholars might take religion and spirituality more seriously – not only by acknowledging the macro-level organizing effects of religious ideologies *at work*, but also by observing religion being communicatively enacted *as work* by human beings for whom faith practices infuse and are seemingly inextricable from their working life and images of their occupational self (Essers & Benschop, 2009).

Within this implication, this dissertation suggests that organization scholars who study contemporary religious occupations must take care when trying to diagnose what the nature of religious work is and/or how it is changing. One major catalyst for the contemporary study of occupations and their associated identities is the landmark article by Barley and Kunda (2001) that calls organization scholars across disciplines to theorize contemporary organizing by observing the concrete activities associated with occupations – a movement they refer to as “bringing the work back in”. While this project was interested in going beyond sociological descriptions of church planter tasks

to investigate the discursive construction of work identities, Barley and Kunda's (2001) call played a key role in shaping this project and, particularly, in framing my analysis in Chapter Four. However, my investigation of church planter work tasks, including how they describe these tasks, raises an interesting issue for this movement of research: that is, though this project helps us point to a few tasks that church planter work may coalesce around, the people who do this work do not necessarily experience a set of tasks that lead to a "predictable job quality" associated with their occupation (Ashcraft, 2013).

Thus, a point of problematization that emerges from this project is the idea that theorizing contemporary work and occupations can get especially tricky when workers themselves are unsure how to identify what their tasks are. In other words, what the researcher might assume to be an observable work task may not necessarily be experienced as meaningful work by the person taking up that task. On the other hand, people who take on relatively unrecognized occupations may also adopt *forms* of work tasks from other work contexts that they think lends "professional" meaning (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007) and value to their work (e.g., church planters praying using a white board while seated around a conference room table). In this case, as organization scholars follow and expand upon Barley and Kunda's (2001) call to develop new organizing archetypes by focusing on the work being done, researchers must get close enough to our subjects to be able to ask *what* work is being done and why it is important or valuable *as work* to *these specific workers*. For example, in my interviews with Philadelphia Church workers about the meaning of staff meetings, Tony described them

as meaningful for helping the church planter work team to create systems; on the other hand, Kason expressed frustration that the meetings were not always long enough to provide him with adequate amounts of social time with his co-workers. Thus, one way that we might take care when studying contemporary religious organizing tasks is to more deeply explore the constitutive and performative aspects of *religious* organizational rituals when they are experienced *as* work (Koschmann & McDonald, 2015), such as church planters praying during working hours and describing that ritual as a work task, even though researchers may not necessarily think of prayer as work.

However, as I noted in Chapter Four, *church planter* can also be thought of as a contemporary religious work archetype that updates what we think religious workers do. On one hand, *church planter* provides a framework for imagining how religious work tasks are influenced by the same socioeconomic discourses as other occupations; in this sense, *church planter* challenges the tendency of organization scholars to (mis)characterize religious organizing as “unique work” (Bickerton et al., 2014), especially in their accomplishment of mundane tasks that are common in other occupations, like going to staff meetings. On the other hand, *church planter* also challenges the secularism bias of organization studies and the suggestion that religion is private and therefore not an organizing factor (Harter & Buzzanell, 2007), especially as doing *mundane/ministry work* reveals an unspoken mix of religious and entrepreneurial ethics, for example, in accomplishing branding and prayer concurrently as work. Moreover, whereas we might traditionally think of religious workers as priestly individuals whose morals dictate a certain distance from secularism, church planter work

seems to abide by an evangelicalism that not only endorses cultural engagement, but aligns the spiritual with the secular; in this, my observations of church planters at work resonate with Chang's (2003) argument about the pragmatism of contemporary religious organizations:

If one accepts a religious worldview that seeks to engage and transform the world, then it seems to follow that pragmatism and entrepreneurialism are consequences of the religious spirit and cannot be categorized as inherently secular (p. 129).

Accordingly, this dissertation implicates shifts in religious work such that by getting close to the religious worker, scholars of organizing and occupations might begin to see how alignment with enterprise across spheres of work, life, and spirituality is increasingly pervasive. Indeed, what is perhaps most fascinating about *mundane/ministry work* and church planter descriptions of what these tasks mean for them is the way in which these tasks require entrepreneurial effort and creativity while rejecting entrepreneurial outcomes for the worker – as seen in church planter discourse about rejecting the megachurch as a model for success and knowing the favor of God. Given cultural shifts in American attitudes about organized religion – notably, not the wholesale rejection of religious faith, but instead, the widespread abandonment of association with churches as organizations (“The end of American exceptionalism,” 2014) – we might think of *mundane/ministry* church planter work as an appeal to the secular value of the entrepreneur coupled with a denial of the politically-motivated growth model that has resulted in the declining contemporary relevance of the church.

Ultimately, there is no evidence to suggest that churches will disappear from our communities anytime soon (Chaves, 2011). In fact, as church planters “get small” by working in coffee shops and holding congregational meetings in non-religious community places like elementary school cafeterias, we could even hypothesize that churches may become *more* locally present, as the church planter model is in some ways tactically invasive of spaces and places we may not normally associate with organized religion. Thus, this dissertation argues that taking religious organizing seriously means accounting for not just the large-scale ideological effects of religion in organizations, but the everyday occupational shifts occurring in American Christianity that change who we think of as a religious worker, what we think their work consists of, and *where* we think of religious work tasks being done. Indeed, I suggest that as religious workers like church planters enact entrepreneurial work to “get closer” to their communities, researchers must “get closer” to the religious work being done if we are to understand the communicative and practical effects occupations like *church planter* have on civic engagement and community life.

Exploring and complicating occupational ecosystems. A central contribution this dissertation makes to the field of organizational communication, and perhaps studies of work and organizing more broadly, is to both extend and complicate the way we theorize occupational identities, including the glass slipper metaphor (Ashcraft, 2013). As part of this contribution, I propose a concept for theorizing occupational identities that I refer to as the *occupational ecosystem*. This idea pushes scholars to broaden the scope of what we include when we investigate the discursive construction and enactment

of contemporary occupations – especially occupations that are significantly influenced by enterprise and notions of entrepreneur/ship. In this section, I describe how I think of the occupational ecosystem and its related concepts, as well as how it fits and expands upon the current literature.

In her article proposing the glass slipper as a metaphor for knowing occupations as having identities that, to some degree, appear to dictate who does and does not “fit into the slipper”, Ashcraft (2013) asks the guiding question: “How is the work-body relation constructed in particular occupational systems, and toward what effects?” Through a broadening shift in vocabulary within this question and others about occupations and their associated identities – from *system* to *ecosystem* – I suggest that scholars of work and occupations can adopt a framework that more accurately highlights the complexity of the relationship between discourses of identity, properties of work, and working bodies. In the remainder of this section, I describe two key features of the occupational ecosystem concept: first, the centrality of a control-resistance dialectic across occupational ecosystems; and secondly, how the people working in an ecosystem may experience a sense of “nowhereness” due to the discursive haziness that often accompanies contemporary occupational identity work.

Ashcraft (2013) implicates notions of discursive control and resistance in her definition of occupational identity, which she argues “produces and mediates the relation between the nature of work and embodied social identities” by constructing “figurative bodies, which interact but may not correspond with actual or usual practitioners”; these figurative practitioners are then “used to create, justify, and naturalize occupational

content, value, practice, and administration” (p. 20). While I agree with Ashcraft’s (2013) argument that this “glass slipper effect” ultimately serves to privilege and disadvantage occupations by claiming who can and cannot embody certain associated social identities, I also think the “glass slipper” (like all “glass” metaphors that help us “see” invisible forms of occupational access and control) suggests a “concreteness” to occupational identity barriers, despite the occurrence of some occupations – including *church planter* – for which notions of work and identity are not so concrete. While I recognize and celebrate the usefulness of glass metaphors, including Ashcraft’s (2013) slipper, I suggest that these are problematically structured metaphoric devices that do not always allow for us to “see” beyond them into the myriad ephemeral and self-contradictory discourses or practices that may characterize the negotiation of contemporary occupational identities.

Consider how Chapters Five and Six juxtapose church planters as they enact religious discourses at work to resist the influence and effects of enterprise culture (e.g., for-profit entrepreneurialism), while variously and often simultaneously enacting enterprise discourse to resist the (perceived) norms of more traditional religious organizations (e.g., cultural disengagement). Within this discursive ambiguity church planters seem to encounter as they make sense of their day-to-day work and identities, they do not seem to be fixed between occupational objects, as if they wear the *entrepreneurial* slipper until they need the *religious* slipper, and vice versa; moreover, there are not just two combinations of these identities that church planters wrestle with at any given time. Indeed, even for those church planters who attempt to enact occupational

control or resistance over *church planter*, the barriers they construct seem foggy at best; for example, while church planter discourse masculinizes the calling of the figurative *religious* practitioner, Chapter Five showed women church plant workers accessing and claiming a sense of calling to describe how they experience their occupational selves.

Thus, given that participants in this study often explain and perform *church planter* as an occupational identity that is variously religious and economic at the same time – and given that they do so in both material *and* virtual work contexts, including highly descriptive and interactive church plant websites, blogs, and other texts – I find the theoretical term “occupational ecosystem” to be useful for thinking beyond the presence of a “glass” structure and conceptually locating the interconnected identity tensions generated by religious and enterprising talk within church planter work culture. Moreover, thinking about church planting as an “ecosystem” of discursive and material work practices keeps intact the organic linguistic quality of “church planter” as a contested occupational identity construct. While I acknowledge that this linguistic quality may not fit all occupations, the ecosystem terminology I employ here foregrounds the complicated but lived experience of constructing and enacting all occupational selves, and challenges scholars to be careful with relying on structured metaphors like the glass slipper or ceiling that may deny participant expressions of more complex occupational realities than binary notions of control and resistance.

Within the occupational ecosystem, the control-resistance dialectic can also be thought of as a search for balance in one’s ecology of identity, such that various occupational selves are played off of each other in a quest for harmony in the

environment. For example, in the church planter ecosystem, entrepreneurial skill development and practices are encouraged, while entrepreneurial motivations or successes are denied as spiritually or morally wrong. At the same time, while religious church planter identities are prioritized, there is a suggestion that to ignore entrepreneurial skill development is unwise. Thus, one way that the occupational ecosystem complicates the control-resistance dialectic is by pointing out the incompleteness of the dialectic and suggesting that as individual workers discursively construct and enact competing occupational selves, they also deny each of those selves complete legitimacy within the ecosystem; in other words, control over an occupational identity is a mirage in the ecosystem, and as other identities are spoken into existence in the ecosystem, our ability to resist their influence is also exposed as flawed.

This is not to say that occupational ecosystems exist without systemic (dis)advantages for certain workers; instead, I argue that the ecosystem concept highlights the functions of political inclusion and exclusion that can be leveraged via strategic occupational ambiguity (Eisenberg, 1984). For example, Chapter Six demonstrates church planters navigating masculinity and femininity in their ecosystem by discursively advocating the value of entrepreneur/ship for accomplishing not just religious gender roles, but appropriate *church planter* gender roles. Moreover, strategic ambiguity emerges in this ecosystem in church planter constructions of God as a creator alongside the entrepreneur as creative worker; in this, accomplishing church planting as religion evokes the nature of Creator-God, and can therefore be seen as appropriately performing the “entrepreneurial nature” of God – in turn moralizing and privileging the

(young, white, masculine, heteronormative, and middle-class) social identities associated with *entrepreneur* within the *church planter* ecosystem (Ahl, 2004; Bruni et al., 2004; Gill, 2014; Gill & Ganesh, 2007). For church planters, the strategic ambiguity they experience and enact within their occupational ecosystem serves to challenge their hidden assumptions that religion is a concrete part of their ecosystem. Indeed, as Chapters Five and Six demonstrated, even church planters do not have one sense of *church planter* or church plant. And, because the society in which church planters work also expresses myriad ways of knowing “church” (as John Oliver demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter), religious discourse in the church planter ecosystem is revealed as multivocal and contributes to the fragmentation of meanings and identities across church planter communities and workspaces/places, preventing *church planter* from being fully claimed or enacted as a concrete notion of self or community.

Ultimately, I want to suggest that while the glass slipper and other glass metaphors imply the possibility of locating an occupational identity “endpoint”, the occupational ecosystem concept moves us away from being too linear in our theories of work and identity, and enables us to acknowledge the incompleteness of all occupational identity figures. Moreover, through an ecosystem lens, we might theorize the effects of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship as invading certain ecosystems where we might not think they belong, thereby (dis)locating our images of certain occupational identities and moving us away from the “whereness” of structured glass metaphors to an acknowledgment of ephemeral “nowhereness” as workers navigate a hazy discursive jungle of the working self. For example, the very title of this dissertation –

“entrepreneurs of the church world” (Mabry, “Four questions about your church plant,” 2015) – represents *church planter* as somewhere between entrepreneur and pastor, but legitimately being neither. These kinds of hidden traps of expression reveal how the figurative *religious* and *entrepreneurial* practitioners of church planting foil each other in their construction, leaving the people who do church planter work beyond liminality and with a sense of “nowhereness” as they encounter numerous competing religious and economic meanings for both work and self that cannot be fully resolved. It is in this sense of “nowhereness” that I argue enterprise discourse works by suggesting to the worker that the way through the jungle is to simply treat all of life as work that must be managed. Indeed, for the church planter, we might consider it ironic that in their quest to “save the lost” through church work, entrepreneur/ship discourse encourages church plant workers to become more enterprising than religious to accomplish their work, such that they sometimes seem to lose a full sense of their religious selves at work.

In closing, I suggest that the occupational ecosystem concept I propose here contributes to studies of work and organizing by deepening our theorizing of occupational identities as unstable, tenuous, discursively contested social constructs, and draws us away from the “fixedness” of glass metaphors, while still valuing the way that the glass slipper in particular calls attention to (eco)systematic patterns of occupational (dis)advantage (Ashcraft, 2013). Furthermore, I do not think of the occupational ecosystem and the glass slipper as incompatible constructs; instead, I am calling on scholars to complicate how we think about the occupational identity ecosystems wherein glass slipper effects occur, such that our expressions of these effects will perhaps more

closely resemble the complexity of lived occupational realities. As Chapters Five and Six demonstrated, *church planter* is an occupational identity that cannot be easily expressed or enacted as a fixed intersection of competing religious or economic discourses. Instead, *church planter* may be more accurately conceptualized as an ongoing discursive identity achievement within a complex occupational ecosystem characterized by an evolving and enmeshed set of cultural, religious, and economic ideas about work. With this in mind, understanding the forms and influence of enterprise discourse in the *church planter* ecosystem also challenges us to rethink *entrepreneur* as an ephemeral identity construct that only loosely and variously exists within the lived experiences of workers in other occupational ecosystems. Thus, organization scholars might more fully operationalize the occupational ecosystem concept by considering how enterprise and entrepreneur/ship contribute to (or diminish) experiences of “nowhereness” for workers who take on more widely recognized occupations than *church planter*. In the next section, I briefly discuss three implications for religious and research practice suggested by this dissertation.

Practical Implications

Because this analysis has centered on generating knowledge about a relatively unknown occupational identity that is emerging in its influence within the American religious community, it highlights multiple practical implications worthy of discussion. I briefly consider three of these implications here, specifically by returning to my research problems and aligning this discussion with them to characterize what my response to those problems could mean for researchers as well as church plant practitioners. First, I

discuss the risks and opportunities presented by negotiating religious occupational identities via discourses of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship; secondly, I consider the necessity of thinking more broadly about entrepreneur/ship in research practice; and finally, I discuss what wrestling over normativity in religious work might mean for church plant communities.

[Church planting] is popular because it's biblical, and it's popular because entrepreneurship and starting new things is popular. (Kason)

(Re)thinking the entrepreneur as a (religious) working ideal. I began this dissertation by suggesting that organization scholars need to take up the opportunity to study the dynamics of religious organizing; and, that one way to do so is to investigate how religious workers navigate occupations and working selves on a daily basis. In the context of this study, I then conducted ethnographically inspired research with church planters, discovering the ways in which they navigate occupational selves via religious and entrepreneurial discourses. What I found to be problematic about my conversations with church planters is the way that people doing this work – like Kason, who is quoted above – seem to easily and uncritically validate *entrepreneur* as moral in its cultural popularity, and thus worthy of emulation in religious work. However, as I have reminded readers before, we must think of *church planter* as an occupational identity that, like *entrepreneur*, is not enacted in isolation; instead, the construction and enactment of *church planter* affects the communities in which these performances occur.

Thus, this dissertation encourages religious leaders to critically (re)think about how the alignment of religious work identities with entrepreneur/ship may shape religious communities and their practices, including the cultural implications of this shift

for church planters and their congregations. Specifically, this dissertation asks evangelical church plant practitioners to (re)consider how the notion of the “ideal entrepreneurial church planter” is (re)structuring church culture, pastoral identities, and the marginalization or inclusion of certain identities in the American church community. Indeed, we could argue that the function of this brand of “religious economics” is a type of inclusion and exclusion that mirrors the neoliberal philosophy of free market capitalism, wherein the traditional support offered by religious communities is replaced by the privileging of goal-directed religious organizing activities – a sacrificing of rich spiritual engagement for the sake of religious efficiency and ritual convenience.

This critical (re)thinking of the navigation of religious occupational identities should also involve questioning the value of entrepreneurial risk-taking as a heroic organizing story in church communities. While the historical figure of the entrepreneur is certainly celebrated for taking risks (Herbert & Link, 1982), church planters must question whether or not “risk-taking” puts their communities at risk by obscuring how church planter work may displace and destroy cultures as it creates them. That is, while entrepreneur/ship may empower church plant leaders to discover and engage with locally relevant meanings by “taking the risk” of reimagining the form and function of the church (Inman, 2000), it may also do so by structuring the church to privilege people who are “good” at “being enterprising” because they have the resources to feel comfortable with taking risks (du Gay, 1996). Thus, this dissertation challenges church plant practitioners to question whether or not valorizing the entrepreneur-as-risk-taker

defeats the purpose of claiming a gospel-centered work morality supposedly based on the availability of grace and forgiveness to all people.

Engaging with “entrepreneur” more broadly. The second research problem that I posed to begin this dissertation involved the need for organization researchers to break away from the mold of thinking about the *entrepreneur* in one-dimensional economic modes or contexts. By only thinking of the entrepreneur in this way, we may contribute to hegemonic notions of entrepreneur/ship as an occupational identity that remedies working class difficulties despite individual circumstances, such that all workers and identities seem to have less meaning and practical capability to accomplish work without entrepreneur/ship (Gill, 2014). Thus, I suggest that problematizing and destabilizing *entrepreneur* means that researchers must adjust our lenses to “see” how those we would not normally think of as entrepreneurs are influenced and shaped by entrepreneur/ship. This dissertation modeled broadening our notions of who “counts” as an entrepreneur by analyzing the ways in which contemporary evangelical church planters discursively construct and enact a figurative *entrepreneurial* practitioner based on popular images of entrepreneur/ship. However, one issue that arose for this dissertation is the problem of attempting to think more broadly about entrepreneur/ship while remaining anchored to my personal assumptions about how different workers may understand and attempt to access entrepreneurial identities at work.

What this means for the practical work of entrepreneur/ship research is that organizational communication scholars must begin to consider how specific stories that are told about entrepreneur/ship make a difference for the specific workers who tell

them. While we might think of enterprise as an umbrella underneath which the entrepreneur emerges as the occupational manifestation of enterprise, “seeing” entrepreneur/ship in diverse contexts does not mean we should attempt to interpret the entrepreneurial experiences of all workers in the same way. In a way, this dissertation is subject to my own critique here, because my iterative analysis approach encouraged me to bring my theoretical predispositions to the field with me (Tracy, 2013). While this approach may have caused me to overlay my own assumptions about entrepreneur/ship onto the experiences of church planters too strongly, it does not invalidate my point that scholars of enterprise and entrepreneur/ship should be critically reflexive about any tendencies to assume ideological or identity alignment *between* entrepreneurs based on widespread cultural ideas that may interpellate our research and fieldwork designs.

(Re)modeling normativity in religious communities. Finally, the third research problem addressed by this dissertation deals with the ways in which religion and enterprise intersect to generate normative visions of identity in contemporary religious communities. Thus, a third practical implication of this study revolves around the idea that creatively (re)constructing churches as more accessible communities of faith practice means creatively (re)organizing how religious leaders, like church planters, model normativity in these communities (Ashcraft, 2013). This kind of creative (re)construction requires acknowledging that the planter-as-entrepreneur image shapes church plant culture to give access to certain identities while it marginalizes others; and, that even as church planters may enact entrepreneur/ship to access cultural meaningfulness in their organizing, they simultaneously create places of worship that

may be inhospitable to identities that are sanctioned by enterprise culture. For example, constantly attributing value to church plants through stories of “doing a new thing” may make these communities feel inaccessible to older generations of religious people.

Admittedly, because church planter is relatively unknown *as an occupation*, it can be difficult to call out the ways in which it (dis)advantages certain identities.

However, church plant practitioners can and should question how assumptions about difference that structure the figurative practitioner(s) of church planting also organize community life in their congregations, the role played by the church in civic engagement, and the church plant as a workspace/place. One way that church planters might begin to actively (re)model a more inclusive community image could be to (re)imagine their occupational identities as less valuable based on their achievement of enterprising outcomes like “selling Jesus”, and more valuable in their ability to help community members creatively practice faith rituals that can be embodied together, including prayer and its associated bodily postures. If church planters already accept ritual practice as a form of work, perhaps creatively restructuring *church planter* as an occupation based on encouraging and developing locally-situated communities of ritual practice would generate more accessible identity norms than those dictated by enterprise.

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

To conclude this dissertation, I discuss three limitations of the study at hand, and consider how these limitations signal future possibilities and opportunities for investigating religion, enterprise, entrepreneur/ship, and occupational identity. First, I acknowledge limitations within the population of the study and the ways in which these

limitations problematically bounded the narratives presented in my analysis. The general scope of the study population was limited overall by my decision to only enroll participants who were known to my early informant, and/or who had participated in a church planter training program cohort with him. While this population boundary was helpful for lending theological coherence to the insights I gathered into the occupational experiences of church planters, it also constrained the emergence of meaningful differences among church planter stories that may have enriched my ethnographic representations of church planter work and life.

Similarly, this study is also limited by the relative absence of the voices of non-employee members of church plants. This is problematic because it reduces the ability of the study to more fully express the complexity of church plant life, and the ways in which intersections between *church planter* and *entrepreneur* may actually influence the communities in which church planter work is accomplished. However, both of these limitations encourage further investigation of *church planter* and other religious occupational identities, because the picture presented here is an incomplete one. Moreover, one fruitful avenue for additional research might be to conduct additional ethnographic work with American church plants that occur in coastal regions, as participants in these communities may have religious beliefs motivated by different political orientations than the members of the church plants I visited in the Southern-Central and Midwestern United States.

Secondly, this study could have benefitted from a stronger analytical focus on the role of space and place in discourses of religion and entrepreneur/ship (Gill & Larson,

2014). Since church planters conduct entrepreneurial religious work in certain cities and communities – and often describe themselves as being specifically and supernaturally called to those cities as sites for church planter work – we can follow Gill and Larson (2014) in theorizing that church planters, like entrepreneurs, are involved in the construction of the identities of their locales (see also Larson & Pearson, 2012). Thus, future research should add this dimension to further problematize religion as an occupational discourse, and to highlight the ways in which religion is a constructed rather than fixed feature of the places in which “church work” occurs. Moreover, space/place could represent a useful and problematizing extension of the occupational ecosystem construct, as it would push researchers to investigate how ecosystem members make claims about *where* work and identities should emerge.

Finally, while the ethnographically inspired data gathering approach I adopted to conduct this dissertation increases our awareness of religion as a dynamic and meaningful form of occupational difference, I also think this methodological approach was limited by a lack of participation in the embodied ritual work of participants. Admittedly, as I wrote in Chapter Three, I experienced some uncomfortable moments when I did not feel like praying with church planters, though they wanted me to; and I am not suggesting that researchers should participate in faith practices they do not believe in or agree with. However, I am suggesting that religious individuals who study religious organizing and occupations should consider possible methodological shifts that may help with the difficulty of explaining tacit *embodied* religious knowledge – especially religious organizing knowledge that cannot fully be known without

recognizing, experiencing, and representing embodied ritual practice, such as prayer, worship, the taking of sacraments, and other rituals that engage the body. Thus, as notions of organizational ritual as a form of agency begin to emerge in contemporary research (Koschmann & McDonald, 2015), I call on religiously identified organization ethnographers to consider how participation in expressions of ritual work might be a dynamic method for contributing diverse knowledge about religion, ritual, and work to the field of organization studies as a whole.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. We are scheduled to meet for an hour together. Does that still work for you? It is important that I honor our time constraints. So, while I encourage you to elaborate on your answers to my questions, I may redirect you with your permission in order to cover all of the issues within an hour. Shall we begin?

1. What would you say a church planter is?
 - a. And is that what you say you do when others ask? Do you tell them you're a "church planter", or what description do you give?
2. Church planting has become very popular within evangelical Christian circles in the United States. Why do you think this is?
3. How did you become a church planter? If you were to narrate your church planting story, what would you tell me? What were some key moments? Did you ever feel "called" to church planting?
 - a. What do you think distinguishes your work from pastors who work at more established churches in the United States?
4. What does your typical workday look like? How would you describe your work environment?
 - a. Are friends and family integrated into this? How much of your life does work take up?
5. When and how did you get involved with Fellowship Associates?
 - a. Does FA continue to figure in your decisions about your organization, or even your faith? How? Why or why not?
 - b. What kind of communication do you keep with FA, if at all?
6. Would you say you are a "pioneer" or "nucleus" church planter, and why or why not?
7. We could actually say that a church planter is similar to an entrepreneur. Would you agree with this? Why or why not?
 - a. What would you say an entrepreneur is? Have non-pastors influenced your thinking here?
8. From your perspective, what do you think it takes to successfully plant a church? In other words, what work practices might help make a successful church plant?
 - a. Could these practices be defined as "entrepreneurial"? Why or why not?
 - b. Are there entrepreneurial opportunities or challenges that you've had to face in doing this yourself?
 - c. How much do you think the community around you matters in making the church plant successful? What qualities of this community have made your job easier or challenged you?

9. How would you define or recognize “failure” as a church planter? Have you ever experienced failure as a church planter? Do you know someone who has?
10. What forms of motivation do you draw on to be successful at work?
- What are the vision, goals, and priorities of your church plant, and how does your work contribute to them?
 - Do you view any other local organizations as “partners”? What about “competitors”?

Closing:

- Where do you hope to see yourself in 5 years? Will you still be a church planter?
- Is there anything I am missing? What questions did I not ask you that you think I should have asked? Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you again for your time and insights. Please remember that all of your answers will remain confidential. Feel free to contact me if you have any further comments, questions, or concerns.